

THE
HISTORY
OF ROME

VOLUME I: THE REPUBLIC

BY MIKE DUNCAN

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THE HISTORY OF ROME



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The History of Rome

Volume I

The Republic

By Mike Duncan

Edited by Peter D. Campbell

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Introduction

Hello, and welcome to the transcripts of *The History of Rome*...

In July 2007, I published the first episode of *The History of Rome* podcast. My intention was to write a complete narrative history of the Roman Empire from the arrival of Aeneas in Italy to the abdication of Romulus Augustulus in AD 476. This was an ambitious project, but for some reason I thought I could do it. I guessed this would take about 75 episodes and be completed in a year-and-a-half. In reality, I spent the next five years working on the show, eventually producing 189 episodes that ballooned to 675,000 words of transcript and 72 hours of audio. Yikes.

What you hold in your hand right now are the edited transcripts of the series. Peter D Campbell and I have worked hard to change as little as possible while making these volumes readable on their own. We have not revised anything just because I'm a better writer now than I was when I started. We have not cluttered every chapter with a bunch of CGI nonsense just because we can. Han still shot first. Livia still did it.

But if you are reading along while listening to the podcast there will be a few differences: 1) The intros and outros to each episode are often re-worded and occasionally eliminated completely. These sections served as recaps or teasers that worked well for a weekly audio series, but become glaringly redundant in a book. Mentions of me taking time off are also omitted. 2) Occasionally I wrote a sentence that in retrospect only worked because I read it in a very specific way. From time to time you'll discover the various clauses of a sentence have been re-ordered to make them not so damn confusing. This is a pretty rare occurrence, but we did change a few along the way 3) Mistakes or inaccuracies are corrected at the point of the mistake. So whenever I said "gotta start this week with a correction..." that correction will have already been made in a footnote attached to the inaccurate statement.

Other than that, this is a faithful record of *The History of Rome*. I hope you enjoy reading the series as much as you enjoyed listening to it. I certainly enjoyed writing it.

Mike Duncan

2015

Chapter 1

In the Beginning

The founding of Rome is an event wrapped in myth. Lacking a credible historical record, it is impossible to know for sure what exactly led to the establishment the Eternal City, but we do know the legend Romans told themselves and some idea of the population migrations that took place in central Italy at the time. Taken together we can piece together a general time-line of events. There may be truth wrapped up in the official legend, and there may not, but it is a good story and an important one to know both for understanding Roman history and its historical legacy on the world. It is the story of a refugee Trojan prince and how his great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandsons would be wet-nursed by a she-wolf and later found the greatest city of the ancient world.

The Exile of Aeneas

The story of Rome begins with the end of the legendary Trojan War. After the Greeks sacked Troy, Aeneas, Hector's chief lieutenant, managed to escape with a few followers. They boarded ships and set out into the Mediterranean to find a new home. Their odyssey took them from Asia Minor to the north coast of Africa where Aeneas sowed the seeds of the three Punic wars by seducing the Carthaginian queen Dido and then abandoning her. Virgil writes that in the final moments before she committed suicide Dido cursed the descendants of both Carthage and Rome to eternal enmity. The Roman poet Virgil, writing in the first century BC describes the scene in Book IV of the Aeneid:

*O my Tyrians, besiege with hate His progeny and all his race to come:
Make this your offering to my dust. No love, no pact must be between
our peoples; No, but rise up from my bones, avenging spirit!*

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

Aeneas's journey after the fall of Troy in Asia Minor to Carthage and eventually the Italian shore



After securing an arch-enemy for Rome, Aeneas sailed to the west coast of Italy where he and his followers hoped to make a settlement. Arriving in the territory of Laurentum, the Trojans were immediately met by armed locals who tried to drive them off. However, their king,

Latinus, decided to make peace rather than war with the foreigners and offered his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas, solidifying an alliance. This marriage came as quite a shock to Turnus, prince of the Rutuli, a nearby tribe, because Lavinia had already been pledged to him. Angered by this slap in the face, he led an attack on the combined Trojan and Latin forces. The Rutuli were defeated, but King Latinus was killed in the fighting, leaving Aeneas in control of both the Trojans and Latins who were rapidly became a single people through intermarriage. Vanquished, Turnus and the Rutuli looked north to the rich and powerful Etruscans for help. The Etruscans were more than willing to lend a hand against the growing menace of the Trojan infused Latins and attacked. However, Aeneas, in his final act, led the Latins to victory, establishing the Tiber River as the boundary between the Latins and the Etruscans.

But who were the Latins, the Rutuli and the Etruscans? Although Roman history begins with the arrival of Aeneas in Italy, he arrived in a land, which was already divided and had its only complex political units. Who were these people? Where did they come from and what sort of lives did they lead? Where does myth end and history begin?

Humorless Anthropology

The origin of the northern Etruscans is debatable. However, DNA evidence points to a migration from Asia Minor, which, if true, offers a context for the legend of Aeneas's arrival from Troy. The Etruscans were the dominant cultural and political force, and came to dominate Latin territory in the waning years of the Roman kingdom. They had developed cities and a confederate state system long before the Latins who remained in traditional tribal affiliations until the foundation of Rome, which was the first major settlement in Latin territory that could be called a city. The Etruscans were artists and craftsmen who set up extensive trading networks to Greece. The trading roads between Etruria and the Greek cities of Magna Graecia in the south ran right through Rome, offering a clue as to the reason for the city's location.

The Latins, in contrast, were simple pastoral herdsmen. Evidence from ancient burial mounds suggests the Latins were descended from Balkan migrants who crossed the Adriatic in pre-history. Mostly shepherds and farmers, they did not have any sort of advanced arts or crafts. What culture they displayed seems to be little more than a blend of Etruscan and Greek elements. Indeed nothing about later Roman history suggests the Latins were innovative at all in art, religion or letters. They excelled at warfare, engineering and administration, but were merely students of philosophy, never instructors. Their gods, to take one obvious example, are little more than an adaption of the Greek pantheon — Zeus becoming Jupiter, Hera becoming Juno and so forth. What bound the Latins together was a common language, distinct from the Etruscan language to the north and the imported Greek to the south. Latin, of course, forms the basis for half the languages in Europe and whose vocabulary still dominates the legal profession.

Romulus and Remus

After Aeneas died, his young son Ascanius grew to be king. The town built by the Trojan settlers had become too small for the exploding population and Ascanius led a group east to found a new settlement called Alba Longa, which would become the seat of the growing Latin kingdom. Generation upon generation followed and the Latins became powerful and secure.

The kingship was passed from father to son until finally it rested upon the head of a man named Numitor. Numitor had a brother name Amulius who coveted the throne and decided to seize power for himself. Numitor was driven from Alba Longa, his sons were killed and his daughter, Rhea Silvia, was forced to become a Vestal Virgin to ensure she would bear no children who could threaten Amulius. However, after taking the vows, Rhea was raped and consequently gave birth to twin boys. Rhea declared that the god Mars was the father but to no avail and, for the crime of allowing herself to be raped, she was thrown into prison.

The twins were sent to be drowned in the Tiber. However, the men entrusted with the task found the Tiber flooded and left the boys in the sluggish flood water rather than slogging their way to the river itself and, when the waters receded, the babies were left alive and well in the reeds. Here legend states that a she-wolf, coming to the river to quench her thirst, found the babies and offered her teats for them to suckle on. A herdsman came upon the scene and gathered the children up from the wolf, which was gently licking them and took them home with him. Even Livy acknowledges that the story of the wolf is a fable and postulates that it may have arisen because the herdsman's wife was a whore named "Wolf".

The herdsman and his wife raised the boys, named Romulus and Remus, as their own and soon they grew to be men. Apparently, the boys took a liking to fighting the local brigands who raided the countryside and began taking the fight to the robbers, raiding their camps and stealing from them. The criminals, angered by the theft of their booty set a trap for the twins. Romulus managed to escape but Remus was captured. The brigands took Remus to the local landowner, who turned out to be none other than the exiled Numitor, and claimed Remus and his brother had been caught stealing Numitor's cattle and that he should be punished.

Numitor was immediately reminded of his twin grandsons and, realizing they would be the same age as Remus was now, began to suspect the boys were his blood. Numitor began making inquiries,

learning the particulars of their upbringing, he became convinced they were his daughter's children. The herdsman, knowing Remus was in Numitor's custody and having himself long suspected his two boys were of royal blood, decided to tell Romulus the whole story of their discovery by the river. From this, a plan was hatched to return Numitor to the throne. With Romulus leading one group of men and Remus another. They surprised and killed Amulius and brought Numitor back to Alba Longa. Numitor told the story of his brother's treachery and the circumstances of his grandson's birth and the people shouted unanimous consent that Numitor be king once more.

After Numitor became king Romulus and Remus decided to found a new settlement at the spot where they had been left to drown. There are two accounts of what happened next. One states that trouble arose when the question of who would be senior in the new city was raised. They decided to allow the gods to decide, and each retired to the top of a hill, Romulus the Palatine and Remus the Aventine, to await a sign. Soon enough six vultures landed at the feet of Remus, and when his followers made this known to Romulus, 12 vultures immediately landed at Romulus's feet. A fight broke out with one side claiming primacy of arrival and the other claiming primacy of number. In this fight, Remus was killed. The other and more famous story is that Remus, mocking his brother, jumped over the partially completed walls and Romulus, in a fit of anger, killed him, swearing, "So perish whoever else shall overleap my battlements." Either way Romulus obtained sole power, the city was named after him and he became its first king.

The legendary date for the foundation is April 21, 753 BC.

Mythical History

Did it happen like this? Almost certainly not. After the sack of Rome in 389 BC most of the early historical record was lost and with it the specifics we need for an accurate telling. However, archaeological evidence seems to support the broader strokes of the legend. Settlements have been found on the Palatine hill that date to the 800s BC suggesting that the legendary chronology is at least in the ballpark. The general story of a struggle between the Latin and Etruscan people ending with ostensible Latin autonomy south of the Tiber also fits our understanding of the ethnic and cultural landscape of the era. Virgil offers a poetic account of the origins of the Roman-Carthaginian rivalry, but no doubt old economic and territorial disputes were sufficient for war. Further, it is doubtful that the site of Rome was chosen because it marked where the twins had been sent to die; more likely an easy river crossing coupled with the natural defenses offered by the nearby hills drew settlers to the area. Furthermore, as already noted, the site lay on the trade road between Etruria and Magna Graecia.

Without any real data to draw from, later Roman historians used common mythological elements to construct a conventional founding legend. Indo-European culture produced numerous examples of the divine twin myth, including Castor and Pollux; and Idas and Lynceus of Thebes. The motif of infant exposure gone wrong crops up in the biographies of both Perseus and Moses. Moreover, most will recognize the virgin birth element from Christianity, but tales of miraculous or virgin births have surrounded important legendary and historical figures for millennia. The addition of Aeneas gives Rome a lofty ancestor and connects their city to the great Greek civilizations the Romans so admired.

However it happened, a settlement was established at a bend in the Tiber. This settlement grew and came to dominate its neighboring communities, then the entire Italian peninsula, then the entire Mediterranean. Next we will cover Rome's unsavory beginnings, who the first Romans were, whose women they stole to ensure there would be a second generation of Romans and whether Romulus, great soldier that he was, died or simply faded away.

Chapter 2

Youthful Indiscretions

After Romulus founded the city, it became apparent he would need to attract settlers in order to ensure its survival. To this end he opened the city to what could tactfully be described as colorful characters, but put simply, they were the dregs of society. Fugitives, escaped slaves, debtors and criminals flocked to the new town for a fresh start and Romulus welcomed them with open arms.

Fighting Men and the Rest

The first order of business, in true Roman fashion, was to establish an army. Romulus sifted through his new subjects and divided them into able-bodied men of military age and, the rest.

Most sources agree that the first legions consisted of 3000 foot-soldiers and 300 cavalry, but accounts differ as to whether there was initially just one legion or whether there were many. Soldiers in those days had to equip themselves so only prosperous citizens could enlist, with the richest serving in the cavalry because they were the only ones who could afford horses. This meant that the interests of the army were, in those early days, firmly squared with the interests of the society it defended. In later years, the legions were filled by professional soldiers, whose interests often diverged from those of the actual citizens of Rome, who had long since given up fighting for themselves. Here the seeds would be sown for civil war, decline and ultimately destruction. However, that is almost a thousand years away.

From the remaining motley assembly of those not called to arms, Romulus created a council of 100 senators to help him govern, either because that number was enough for his purposes or because there were only 100 men respectable enough to be given such responsibility. The descendants of these men would become the patrician class of later Rome, who would find themselves constantly at odds with the Plebeian class — the descendants of the remaining unwashed masses.

The Rape of the Sabine Women

Rome was now ready to defend and govern itself, but there was just one problem, the new arrivals were almost entirely male. Without any women around, the entire dream of Rome would die in a single generation. So delegations were sent to neighboring communities to ask for intermarriage rights, but wherever they went they were refused. Fathers did not want their daughters married to the Romans, who were, after all, nothing more than a collection of despicable castoffs. The Romans resented these rejections and so Romulus thought up a sure-fire way to acquire wives for his people: they would steal them.

The Romans invited all the neighboring communities to a great festival honoring Neptune. They spared no expense in preparing and promoting the celebration and on the appointed day a great crowd filled Rome, including, famously, the Sabines. All was going well and no one suspected a thing until Romulus suddenly gave a signal and the men of Rome seized all the visiting women they could capture. The festival was broken up and the parents of the seized women fled the city, cursing Roman treachery.

The seized women were naturally horrified at their predicament, but Romulus went to them and claimed that it was their parents who were to blame because they had been too proud to wed their daughters to Roman men. Furthermore, he said, they would be treated better in Rome than anywhere else because the Roman men would feel obligated to work off the guilt for what they had done. Apparently, this mollified the women, but it did nothing for their parents and brothers.

Attacks followed in succession from the victimized communities, but each was repelled by Romulus and Roman forces. Finally, only the Sabines had not yet sought revenge. They waited and planned rather than immediately taking up arms. When the time was right, the Sabines bribed a young girl to let them into the citadel of the city and took it before the Romans could react. Romulus immediately mustered his army and launched a counter-attack. A fierce battle was joined but neither side could gain the upper hand. Finally, the Sabine women, daughters of one side and wives of the other intervened, throwing themselves between the two, pleading with them to halt.

We are mothers now, they cried, our children are your sons, your grandsons: do not put on them the stain of parricide. If our marriage - if the relationship between you - is hateful to you - turn your hatred against us. We are the cause of strife; on our account our husbands and

fathers lie wounded or dead and we would rather die ourselves than live either widowed or orphaned. (Livy 1.13)

Their entreaties moved the opposing armies and peace was made, ultimately joining the Romans and Sabines into one political entity.

The abduction episode has lodged itself in the western imagination, commonly referred to as the Rape of the Sabine Women. The event has been depicted by countless painters including Nicolas Poussin, Peter Paul Reubens and Pablo Picasso. Jacques-Louis David depicted the conclusion of the story in *Intervention of the Sabine Women*. Anyone who has read *Watership Down* will remember that the entire second half of the book is taken up with an adventure to secure female rabbits for the new warren, no doubt taking its inspiration from the Roman example. Although in that case Hazel and his followers were far more ethical in their solution.

Roman-Sabine Union

After the Sabines joined with the Romans, a power sharing agreement was reached and Romulus agreed to rule jointly with Tatius, the Sabine king. The newly integrated citizens of the city were divided into three tribes: the first being made of Romans, the second Sabines and the third the remaining population, mostly of Etruscan origin. The leading 100 Sabines were then added to the Senate, doubling its size.

Leadership thus established, Romulus formed the first great citizen assembly, the *Comitia Curiata*. To do so he divided the tribes further into 10 *curiae*, naming each one after an abducted Sabine woman to honor them for their role in the peacemaking. Each *curiae* cast one collective vote (making 30 total), and the assembly was tasked with electing various magistrates and enacting routine laws. Thus, the original political constitution was settled. The kings reigned supreme, but, from the beginning, both aristocrats and commoners were involved in the legislative and judicial functions of the state. It was at this point that the legions doubled in size to approximately 6000 men, a number that would stand for the remainder of the empire.

The power sharing agreement with Tatius lasted all of five years. The Sabine king, for whatever reason assaulted some envoys from Lavinium, and when he later arrived in that city for routine religious services, he was set upon by a mob and killed. Romulus, not seeking war with Lavinium and no doubt secretly welcoming the death of his rival, did nothing to avenge the death of his co-ruler. The Sabines were outraged, but fear of Romulus's power and his apparently divine mission held their tongues. Romulus now reigned supreme once again.

The Strange Death of Romulus

For the next forty years though, the Romans fought hostile neighbors continually, usually Etruscan cities in the north. By the time of Romulus's death, he had made the Romans a power to be reckoned with. The details of his passing confirm his status as a mythological figure. One day, seated on the throne, he was reviewing his troops and a storm blew up. Thunder clapped and Romulus was enveloped by a cloud. When the storm dissipated, the throne was empty and Romulus was gone. The senators who stood beside him searched, but no trace of Romulus was ever found. Livy notes that Romulus was always more popular with the people than he was with the Senate and it is entirely possible he was murdered by the Senators who stood beside him. I find it part of Livy's charm that he would go out of his way offer a more plausible explanation for the death of such an obviously fictitious character.

The Answer to Every Question

The life of Romulus is a convenient myth. Who founded Rome? Romulus. Where does the name come from? Romulus. Who organized the legions? Romulus. Who divided up the tribes, organized the senate, and began the citizens' assembly? Romulus, Romulus, Romulus. It is possible the stories grew from the life of a real person, but most likely Romulus was created out of necessity to answer questions later Romans had about their own past.

It seems naive of the Romans to believe that so much could be owed to a single man, but when we look at America's almost religious veneration of George Washington, it begins to make sense. In 500 years will historians be reporting that George Washington was born of a cherry tree (and had wooden teeth to prove it), that he flew over the Delaware River, defeated the British army and designed the constitution all by himself? It seems crazy, but as time goes by the subtleties of actual events are compressed into small digestible units. Horatio Gates has already been pushed from the collective consciousness and is known only to historians, but it was his victory at Saratoga, not Washington's, that led the French to support the America Revolution and thus ensure its success. That story, though, is too complicated. Most Americans do not know how critical French involvement was, let alone that Washington had little to do with securing it. Washington beat the British. That is the story of the American Revolution. As the years pass will the name of Madison be lost? Hamilton? Even the great Thomas Jefferson, whose fame is second to none, may yet fall under the juggernaut of this mythical Washington as he, like Romulus, becomes the answer to all questions about the founding of America. Countless hands working patiently over years no doubt transformed Rome from a collection of shepherds into a regional power, but their names have been lost and their deeds have been rolled into the biography of a single mythical man.

Unsavory Origins

The early days of Rome stand in stark contrast to its later greatness. To say that the mighty empire came from humble roots would be a gross understatement and entirely misleading. I have always found it odd that more was not done to alter the details of Rome's unsavory beginnings. Founded by a man who killed his own brother and was raised by a whore, the city's initial inhabitants were thieves, crooks and beggars. Such an unappealing lot that they could not find a single woman who would have them, they resorted to kidnapping. To protect their ill-gotten wives they then proceeded to make war on their new in-laws. There is not a single sympathetic figure in the whole bunch. You almost find yourself wanting the Etruscans to put down this rabble and restore some sense of decency to the world. However, alas, the Romans were strong and would not be conquered, even if they were total bastards. This is the moral of Rome's birth. The Romans won, grew and thrived not because they were right or good or moral or God's chosen people but because they were strong and knew how to win in battle. Might may not make right but it will make a thousand-year civilization.

Next we will discuss Romulus's successors to the throne, Rome's religious awakening, and how the kings were finally run out of town.

Chapter 3

The Seven Kings of Rome

753 – 509 BC

This chapter will cover the lives of the six successors of Romulus, who they were and what roles they played in the evolution of Roman law and society. I call this chapter “The Seven Kings of Rome” because common historical nomenclature always refers to “The Seven Kings of Rome.” So though we will only be talking about the remaining six kings, it seemed appropriate to use the phrase as a title, even if it isn’t technically accurate. Just remember ... there were seven kings of Rome.

In reality, however, there were almost certainly *more* than seven kings of Rome. The idea that seven successive kings could reign for an average of 35 years each stretches credulity. Nowhere else in the history of mankind have seven monarchs in a row managed such continuous good luck. The stories handed down to us of Numa and Hostilius and Marcius and the Tarquins are no doubt apocryphal, meant to cover the ground between Romulus and the founding of the Republic, while explaining the evolution of the city’s culture at the same time. So just remember, even though there weren’t really seven kings of Rome there were “Seven Kings of Rome.”

After Romulus died or disappeared, there was a crisis. Who would lead the Romans now that their first and only king was gone? Trouble arose not just from the question of which particular man would reign, but also from the question of what tribe he would be from. The Sabines, who had suffered the sole reign of Romulus in silence, now wished to see one of their own placed upon the throne. The Romans found this idea preposterous, but the Sabines refused all Roman candidates and the Romans, in turn, refused all Sabine candidates. To avoid a slip into anarchy it was decided that each senator in succession would reign for a single day, until an acceptable man was found to rule. This was Rome’s first experience of an interregnum, or period between official sovereigns. A compromise was finally proposed that allowed the Romans to choose whomever they wished, without Sabine veto, as long as the man was a Sabine. The Romans agreed to this and picked a man of universal renown, Numa Pompilius. The Sabines, delighted by the choice agreed at once and messengers were sent to Numa to present him the good news. To the amazement of everyone however, Numa refused the offer and it was

only after much cajoling that he agreed to take the throne. (Plutarch 2.II-III)

The Second King of Rome: Numa Pompilius

Numa was a bit of an odd bird. He disdained all luxury and had devoted his life to religious contemplation. He often took long walks alone and it was believed that on these strolls he conversed with the gods (not that this concerned anyone, quite the opposite, it only enhanced his reputation that the gods spoke to him, but still, not exactly a man you usually find at the head of a growing military power). Numa did not even live in Rome, he resided in a nearby town and was, for the most part, put off by the violence and greed of the city. This second king of Rome was the opposite of Romulus in almost every way. Where Romulus was brash, Numa was reserved. Where Romulus was a warrior, Numa was a pacifist. Where Romulus sought glory and fame, Numa sought peace and solitude. Overnight Numa changed the trajectory of Rome's march to greatness.

When Numa arrived in Rome, he found a warmongering population of brutes who had known 40 years of war; when he died, he left Rome a population of farmers who had known 40 years of peace. The remarkable transformation was attributed entirely to Numa's introduction of religion to the city. He turned the people's attention away from the battlefield and toward the heavens. Desiring peace more than anything else, Numa devised complex religious rites to occupy the time of the now demobilized army so they would not grow restless and provoke unnecessary wars. He instilled in the Romans a fear and awe of the gods which would last for the remainder of the Roman Empire.

Numa's Reforms

Numa is credited with the foundation of the most important religious institutions in Rome. He imported the Vestal Virgins and established the laws governing their watch over the eternal flame. He created the office of *Pontifex Maximus*, the high priest of Rome, who would be responsible for the maintenance of all religious services. In an act of remarkable foresight, he declined to serve in that role himself, establishing a division between the sovereign and religion that could not be meddled with by future kings. He believed that later kings would be so involved in wars that they would neglect their religious duties and bring the wrath of the gods upon the city. The office of *Pontifex Maximus* would remain an independent authority until the title was claimed for the emperors by Augustus at the dawn of the *Imperium*. At the end of the empire, the title passed to the popes, who hold it to this day, 2600 years after its inception.

Just as Romulus is the answer to all questions about the founding of the city, Numa is the answer to all questions about the origin of religious practices. Who divided regular days from holy days? Numa. Who created the priesthood of Mars? Numa. The priesthood of Quirinus? Numa. Who built the altar to Jupiter? Numa of course. In the development of Roman culture Numa is second only to Romulus in importance and to some he was even more important. Niccolo Machiavelli wrote:

And for anyone who considers Roman history carefully, it is clear how much religion helped in commanding armies, in inspiring the plebeians, in keeping men good and in making the wicked feel shame. Thus if one were to debate about the prince to whom Rome owed the most, I think Numa would sooner obtain the first place, for where there is religion, one can easily introduce arms, but where there are arms, but no religion, the former can only be introduced with difficulty.

Perhaps Numa's most famous addition to Rome was the Temple of Janus. The gates of the temple were to remain open while Rome was at war and closed in times of peace. For Numa's entire reign the doors stayed shut, but after his passing, they were almost continuously open. Numa's dream of peace, it would seem, died with him, and his reign would be an anomaly in Roman history. Of Numa's Rome, Livy writes:

Once Rome's neighbors had considered her no more than an armed camp in their midst threatening the general peace; now they came to revere her so profoundly as a community dedicated wholly to worship the mere thought of offering her violence seemed to them like sacrilege.

Numa reigned for 43 years and died in 673 BC. His successor to the throne, Tullus Hostilius did his level best to banish forever this image of Rome as a city of docile farmer priests.

The Third King of Rome: Tullus Hostilius

Tullus was the opposite of Numa in almost every way. He longed for a return to the martial virtues of Romulus. He believed Numa had left the Romans soft and dangerously unprepared for what Tullus saw as inevitable attack from hostile neighbors. The peace of the previous decades could not hold forever and if Rome was to live, it had to fight. With this in mind, Tullus looked around for a clash that would reinvigorate the warrior spirit of his people, and found it in the place of Romulus's birth. A cattle-raiding dispute along the border between Rome and Alba led to mutual recriminations and for Tullus this was enough of a pretext and war was declared (he even managed to arrange things so that the Romans looked like the aggrieved party who were being dragged against their will into battle).

Armies from both sides advanced on one another, but before the order for full-scale engagement was given, Mettius, the leader of the Albans, approached Tullus with an unusual proposal. There was nothing to be gained, the Alban said, in a bloody struggle between two familial people when the Etruscans sat at both their doorsteps eagerly awaiting any opportunity to invade. A fight between Alba and Rome would deplete the strength of both victor and vanquished, leaving the door wide open for the Etruscans to enslave them all. Mettius proposed that single combat should decide their quarrel, that way their respective armies could still keep the ambitious Etruscans in check. Tullus agreed reluctantly, seeing the logic of Mettius's argument, though it would not be single combat *per se* that would decide things. Each army's ranks held three brothers, triplets, who were chosen to fight for the fate of their people. The fight between the Roman Horatii and the Alban Curiatii is an episode, like the rape of the Sabine women that has found its way into countless works of art and literature, most famously in the *Oath of the Horatii* by Jacques-Louis David, that great lover of antiquity.

The Legend of the Horatii

In front of the opposing armies the two sets of brothers squared off. The fight was furious, and in quick succession two of the Romans lay dead. Horatius, the remaining brother, knowing he could not take all three of his enemies at once, ran up a nearby hill, forcing the three Curiatii to chase him. As the first neared, Horatius turned abruptly and killed him. The second Alban brother arrived too late to help, and Horatius fought and killed him as well. The third Curiatii, weary from the chase and from wounds sustained in the earlier fighting was no match at all upon arrival. He fell to his knees and Horatius did not fight him so much as execute him, plunging his sword down the poor bastard's throat.

The Romans cheered their victory and the Albans, grumbling at the Mettius's deal, were forced to withdraw and submit to Roman rule. However, Mettius, aware of how precarious his authority was in the aftermath of this non-defeat by Rome conspired to release his people from subjugation. He induced Veii, the nearest Etruscan city and, as we will later see, an important rival of early Rome, to attack the Romans. The Albans, Mettius said, would be called to aid Rome, and he promised that at a decisive moment in the battle the Albans would desert, leaving the Roman flank unguarded. Veii jumped at the opportunity to crush Rome and attacked immediately. Just as Mettius predicted Tullus called upon the Albans to join the fight and the armies gathered to do battle. Just as the fight was about to begin Mettius ordered the Albans to withdraw. The Roman soldiers were shocked to see their allies suddenly leaving, but Tullus thinking quickly, addressed his troops telling them that it was his plan for the Albans to sneak around behind the enemy. The Romans, heartened, marched into battle with confidence and defeated the Veiites.

Destruction of Alba Longa

Back in camp, Tullus ordered the arrest of Mettius and had him brought before the Roman troops. Tullus then revealed the treachery of the Alban leader and, to the horror of his men, passed, without trial, a sentence of death by dismemberment. Their leader dead, Tullus then ordered the destruction of Alba Longa itself. He ordered the city destroyed and the citizens relocated to Rome where they would become Romans, forever wiping the Albans from the map.

Tullus reigned 32 years and died in 642 BC. The return to arms was his lasting legacy and the incorporation of the Albans his most important contribution to the growth of the city. Henceforth Rome's neighbors returned to their view of the city as little more than an armed camp and worked tirelessly to defeat the Roman menace. Never again would Rome enjoy an extended period of uninterrupted peace, despite the efforts of Tullus's successor Ancus Marcius, the grandson of Numa, to bring the population back to his grandfather's vision of peace.

The Fourth King of Rome: Ancus Marcius

Less is known about Ancus than his predecessors, but we do know that he attempted to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, but was far less successful in securing a lasting peace for Rome. Events conspired to force war upon him and despite his natural proclivities he accepted his fate and led the Romans into battle. A confederation of Latin communities who chafed under Roman dominance took Ancus's ascension as the perfect opportunity to attack, believing they had another Numa on their hands who would be an easy mark. However, Ancus accepted the challenge and the Roman forces, battle tested by the years under Tullus routed each in turn. The defeated inhabitants were forced, like the Albans, to abandon their homes and settle in Rome, while Romans were sent to settle the vacated towns. Through this policy the population of the city swelled and the surrounding countryside was filled with subjects loyal to Rome.

At the outset of the conflict with the Latins, Ancus made his most important contribution to Roman society. Dissatisfied with the haphazard way war began between Rome and her enemies, he decided to inject a sacred ritual, introducing something of Numa into the barbarism of armed conflict. A specific formula was proscribed as to exactly how the Romans would declare war on an enemy. It involved sending envoys into enemy territory, announcing the war to the first man met in an official pronouncement, making more official declarations at appointed times, waiting 33 days, and finally throwing a spear into enemy territory signally the beginning of hostilities. The entire process may seem a bit overwrought but it demonstrates the Roman desire to infuse all aspects of life with the rule of law even if the result was savage bloodshed.

After the campaign against the Latins, Ancus won an important victory against the Veientes, gaining control of the Maesian Forest and thus extending Roman territory all the way to the sea. The consequences of this event cannot be overstated. Through Ostia, the port town founded by Ancus at the mouth of the Tiber, all initial Roman forays into the Mediterranean were launched and received.

Ancus reigned 24 years and died in 617 BC. At his death, Rome found itself immeasurably strengthened by the addition of countless new citizens, a neighborhood free of enemies and a port to call its very own.

Pillars of Rome: War and Religion

The lives of these kings are apocryphal biographies designed to explain the origin and development of Rome to later Romans. What is mostly being fleshed out in the story of these first kings is the relationship between the two most important pillars of Roman society: war and religion. The warlike Romulus is followed by the religious Numa who is followed by the warlike Tullus until finally the two pillars are joined in Ancus, the religious king who is dragged into battle by fate. This interplay is instructive and offers a neat encapsulation of their character. The Romans are a warlike people tempered by religion not a religious people forged into warriors. Ultimately, it is war, not prayer, that defines the Romans.

Imagine if it had been the opposite. A people founded by a religious pacifist and succeeded by a warrior who was then succeeded by a pacifist who and then succeeded by a warrior dragged by fate into a religious life. It paints a very different picture. The Romans are fighters through and through, though Machiavelli's point is well taken. Without religious tempering it is doubtful the Romans could have sustained a republic based upon the rule of law and would have remained an unremarkable tribe of violent barbarians. To sum up, the Romans were soldiers who took oaths seriously, not priests who took swordsmanship seriously.

The Tarquin Dynasty

The dynasty signals a change in Rome's development, taking it from a monarchy to the misrule of despotism and leading subsequently to the republic. The dynasty comprises Tarquinius Priscus, a decent if manipulative king, his adopted son and successor Servius Tullius, and finally his real son Tarquinius Superbus, who usurped his adopted brother, and was then himself usurped by a fed-up mob, marking him forever with the infamy of being the last king of Rome.

Lucius Tarquinius Priscus was born in Tarquinii, one of the twelve cities of Etruria, the son of a Corinthian exile named Demaratus. Tarquin, the name by which history remembers him, was a shrewd businessman who became wealthy, but due to his racially mixed heritage, he was only admitted so far up the Etruscan social and political ladder. Angered at being denied the respect he felt he deserved, he decided to move to Rome, a city famous for offering men a fresh start. In Rome Tarquin made an immediately splash. He gave lavishly, funding public projects, charities and anything else that would bring him renown. It did not take long for Tarquin to come to the attention of Ancus Marcius, the aging king. In his final years, Ancus brought Tarquin into his confidence, leading to a close relationship that resulted in Tarquin ultimately being made guardian of Ancus's two young sons when the king died.

The Fifth King of Rome: Tarquin

Tarquin knew an opportunity when he saw it and after Ancus died he sent the two boys away on a hunting trip. He then lobbied the Senate to hold elections for a new king immediately, to avoid any possible threat to the city brought on by the vacuum in leadership. Tarquin had made a lot of friends in the short time he had been in Rome and his further generosity no doubt convinced any fence sitters that he was the man for the job. He was elected in a landslide and became the fifth king of Rome.

One of his first acts, demonstrating his characteristic shrewdness was to expand the Senate by another 100 men, bringing their total number to 300. The new Senators were wholly obligated to Tarquin for their positions and, predictably, supported him in everything he did, leaving the Senate little more than a rubber stamp for Tarquin's policies. This could have proven disastrous if Tarquin had been an incompetent or tyrannical leader, but he proved to be a conscientious and able king, both as an administrator and military commander.

Soon after his election, Rome found itself again at war with some of its Latin neighbors. Tarquin easily routed his opponents and returned to Rome with a great deal of plunder. He decided to celebrate his victory by throwing public games the like of which had never been seen. However, there was no stadium large enough for Tarquin's vision, so he ordered a hippodrome built between the Palatine and Aventine hills. This hippodrome, when completed, would become known as the Circus Maximus, one of the greatest sporting venues in the ancient world. It would remain in continuous use for the thousand-year existence of the empire.

Immediately after work began on the Circus Maximus, Rome found itself embroiled in a fight with the remaining independent Sabine communities. They had never gotten over having half their population annexed by Romulus and now sought to challenge the upstart for control of the region. Tarquin again led the Romans to victory, defeating the Sabines with strategy as well as brute force, destroying a bridge the Sabines had used to cross into Roman territory, cutting off any escape route, and then smashing them against the river.

To celebrate this victory Tarquin inaugurated one of the most famous of all Roman traditions: the triumph. Later years would set guidelines for what constituted an official triumph, but the basic parts were put in place by Tarquin. The leader of the victorious army rides into the city on a chariot drawn by four horses; the legions follow with prisoners of the vanquished army and all manner of plunder

seized from the enemy. To be awarded a triumph was the greatest honor a Roman general could receive. More will be said later about the traditional elements of a triumph, so for now we will simply note for trivia's sake that Tarquinius Priscus celebrated the first triumph.

Adoption of Servius Tullius

At about this time a fantastic story reached the king. The head of a slave's sleeping child had suddenly burst into flames, though the child remained unhurt and did not wake up. Witnesses testified that they had seen the event with their own eyes and that the flames only disappeared when the child awoke. Tarquin's wife believed it was an omen of the child's future greatness and implored the king to adopt him, so as to invite destiny into their house, and not have it break down their doors. Tarquin agreed and the child, Servius Tullius, was adopted by the king. He raised the boy as his own, and the omen bore out as the boy grew into a capable leader and eventual heir apparent to the throne.

Murder Most Foul

All was progressing nicely for Tarquin, but trouble was brewing. The sons of Ancus had not forgotten how Tarquin had denied them their birthright, and resolved to reclaim what they felt was theirs. Knowing they could never get close to the king, the brothers enticed two men to do their dirty work for them. The two men arrived at the palace and pretended to have a loud quarrel, eventually demanding the king settle the dispute. Tarquin came to see what the commotion was about and agreed to settle the fight. However, as he sat to adjudicate one of the men pulled out an ax he had hidden in his robes and lodged it in the back of the king's head. Tarquin fell, and the two men attempted to escape but were immediately captured. Tarquin's wife, Tanaquil, seeing the severity of the wound immediately cleared the room and brought in Servius Tullius to help her tend the king. Over the body she told Servius that nothing could be done for Tarquin, but that it was imperative the men responsible for the crime should not sit on the throne. She implored Servius to take part in a charade to guarantee that neither of Ancus's sons would ever be king. Throwing open a window and addressing the crowd that had by this time gathered, Tanaquil told them that her husband's wound was only superficial and the king would be back on his feet soon. In the meantime, she told them to obey Servius who would act as king until Tarquin could resume his duties. At this point, of course the king was already dead. Tarquin reigned 37 years and died in 579 BC.

Servius performed the duties of king for a time as if he were merely acting in Tarquin's stead, going so far as to reserve judgment in some legal disputes, claiming that he must consult with the king. The sons of Ancus, believing their plot had failed and seeing Servius secure on the throne went into exile.

The Sixth King of Rome: Servius Tullius

Not long after the transfer of power, Veii launched an attack on Rome and Servius marched to meet them. Completely destroying the Veiiite army, Servius returned to Rome a beloved savior. At this point, clearly in command of the throne, the death of Tarquin was announced. No one questioned Servius's continued reign as king and the plan hatched by Tanaquil was brought to a successful conclusion.

Servius would be the second to last king of Rome and by all accounts the last good one. He was responsible for the final reconfiguration of Roman society prior to the establishment of the republic; a reconfiguration that would have a profound effect on the way that republic would ultimately be governed. Desiring to take stock of the city's resources, wealth and population he instituted the first census. Based upon the data he received he divided landowning Romans, known as *assidui*, into five classes. Nominally divided by wealth, the idea was to establish who could provide what when war inevitably came knocking.

The first class was the richest, able to provide a helmet, round shield, bronze breastplate, leg armor (greaves), sword and spear. The second class provided all the same equipment as the first save the breastplate. The third provided the same as the second but for the leg armor. Only a spear and javelin were required of the fourth class. The fifth class provided merely slings and stones. Sandwiching these classes were the richest of the rich, already separately designated as Equites, cavalrymen able to provide horses, and the poorest of the poor (i.e. most of the population) who were exempted from military service. Men aged 18-40 from the five classes formed the legions when the need, which was often, arose.

The classes did not serve a strictly military function, they also formed the basis of the new Roman Electoral College. The old tribal assembly created by Romulus, the Comitia Curiata, was surpassed by Servius's new Comitia Centuriata. Each of the classes were divided further into centuries, which voted as blocks. The centuries, however were not equal in size. The first class, which was the smallest, was divided into 80 centuries. The second, third and fourth classes each had 20. The fifth, by far the largest was composed of 30. The small group of equites were divided into 12 centuries and the landless masses were granted just one. Elections being determined by simple majority, the equites and the first class held between them all the votes they needed to control who would hold office and what policies would be pursued. There was some logic to the wildly skewed voting

system. The wealthy shouldered the financial burdens of both state and military and thus felt entirely justified in their stranglehold on power. The bulk of the population however, would come to view the system as entirely unjust and would eventually have to take drastic steps for their voices to be heard.

Servius's reign was progressing nicely, the Latin communities even contributed funds to build a temple to Diana in Rome, admitting once and for all that Rome was the capital of Latium. However, all was not well. Just as Ancus's sons were the undoing of Tarquin, so would the sons of Tarquin be the undoing of Servius. Servius believed he had covered this obvious threat by marrying his daughters to the two Tarquin boys Lucius and Arruns. However, this was not enough for Lucius, who felt he had been tricked out of his rightful succession, though his new wife was noncommittal about this alleged injustice. His brother Arruns, who could not have cared one way or the other, found himself married to a woman, Tullia, who resented his lack of ambition and admired Lucius's drive. Tullia further despised her own sister for not supporting an obviously great man in his quest for the throne. Evil took hold of them, and, not being particularly creative, they decided to simply kill their unwanted mates so they could be together and pursue the crown at full throttle.

The newlyweds began a whisper campaign against Servius, pointing out his low birth and the fact that he had never been truly elected. To the richest men in Rome they alleged that the census was no more than a trick to expose their wealth so Servius could snatch it up and hand it over to his low born friends. Lucius grew ever bolder as he gained support, until finally he decided to make his move. He went to the palace while Servius was away and sat on the throne, demanding that the Senate assemble before him. When they did, out of a mixture of fear and confusion, he demanded they kneel before him and hail him King Tarquin. He was in the midst of a lengthy speech degrading Servius, when the old king appeared demanding an explanation. A scuffle ensued between the supporters of Tarquin and those loyal to Servius. In the melee the old king himself was struck and killed. Servius had reigned 43 years and died in 535 BC. Lucius would become known to history as Tarquinius Superbus, or Tarquin the Proud, the last king of Rome.

The Last King of Rome: Tarquinus Superbus

From the start, Tarquin was the very model of a tyrant. He was vain, arrogant, pompous and dismissive of both the people and the Senate. He built monuments to himself at the expense of the rich using the labor of the poor. Smart enough to understand his shaky position, having seized power without so much as a nod to electoral formalities, he chose fear as the basis for his reign. He claimed for himself all judicial and legislative functions, and dared anyone to oppose him. Those who did quickly regretted their choice. Tarquin arrested, tried and executed his opponents, completely bypassing the traditional court system. He confiscated property whenever he saw fit, and arbitrarily reduced the ranks of the Senate leaving it anemic and unable to counter his actions.

Tarquin's misconduct was not confined to the city itself. He sought to consolidate Rome's power over Latium and to this end called a council of the local nobility. He let them sit all day without making an appearance until one of them rose and to declare that Tarquin was making them wait on purpose to show he could order them around at will. Just then Tarquin finally appeared. The king made note of the man who had spoken against him and, after the meeting broke up, bribed one of the noble's slaves to plant a cache of weapons in his master's room. The deed done, Tarquin recalled the council and announced that he had just discovered a plot against his life and accused the offensive noble of being its leader. They marched as a group to where the noble was staying and discovered the hidden weapons. That, coupled with his speech from the day before were enough to frame the poor man and he was immediately executed without so much as a trial. The remaining Latin nobility, whether they believed the charges or not, believed that Tarquin was capable of anything and so did nothing to challenge his position in Rome. The city and surrounding countryside thus pacified, Tarquin sat back to enjoy the fruits of his labor. However, only poisonous fruit grows from such poisonous seeds and Tarquin would soon pay the ultimate price for his underhanded tactics.

Tarquin, obviously, had engendered no good will in the city and the population waited only for a spark to light them into full revolt. Tarquin's own son would provide that spark. The young man, Sextus, was invited to a dinner party hosted by Collatinus, a local noble and upon meeting the lady of the house Lucretia, decided that he must have her. Inflamed with lust he returned to the house while Collatinus was off laying siege to the nearby town of Ardea and raped her. His lust sated, Sextus rode off unaware of what he had just set in motion.

Collatinus, riding back to Rome with a certain Lucius Junius Brutus, was met by a messenger who bid him to return at once to his house. There, surrounded by her father, Collatinus and Brutus, Lucretia told them what Sextus had done and then, overwhelmed by shame, took a knife and stabbed herself in the heart. The three men, grief stricken, stood over her body and swore that the Tarquins would pay for her death. Returning at once to the encamped army at Ardea, Brutus raised them into revolt with a stirring speech denouncing the Tarquins as oppressive criminals. He then led the army back to Rome where he planned to expel the Tarquins once and for all. Arriving in the city he marched through the streets and found a population slaving away on Tarquin's various pet projects and ready for revolution. Tarquin, at this point, having heard of the mutiny in Ardea had ridden out to take control of the situation, but instead found the army gone and himself an exile from the city he allegedly ruled. He reigned 24 years and would die seeking, but never regaining, the throne.

Freedom

Back in the city, the liberated people declared the Tarquins enemies of the State and forever barred them from the city. The Comitia Centuriata was convened and it was decided that kings should never again rule Rome and that two men should be elected annually to be leaders, so that power could never again be concentrated in the hands of a single man. Collatinus and Brutus were duly elected and were inaugurated as the first two consuls in Roman history. The year was 509 BC and the most famous republic in the history of the world was born.

Mythology and Monarchy

The story of the ill-fated Tarquin dynasty casts an interesting shadow over Roman history. Through the obviously apocryphal royal biographies a general outline of actual history begins to emerge. Roman culture was derived largely from Etruscan and Greek influences, so, as an instructive parallel we are given the story of a family of kings who became masters of Rome after emigrating from Etruria and were descended from an exiled Greek. This dramatic, if fictitious account has roots in reality. Modern historians recognize the dominance Etruria had over Rome until the era of the founding of the republic. It is thought that Etruscan kings did indeed command Rome and that they were ejected by a native population weary of their rule, though the neatness of this account no doubt misses a reality filled with intermarriage and colliding cultures, making it hard to know who was a native Roman and who was a foreign Etruscan.

The story of the kings also offers a moral that the Romans followed with great success and abandoned at their peril. Until the ill-fated Tarquinius Superbus, none of the kings had been the son of a previous ruler. Hereditary succession played almost no part in the ascension of the kings. Ancus Marcius was the only one who was even related to one of his predecessors, and he was the grandson of Numa, not an immediate heir. This stands in stark contrast to the monarchies that emerged in the middle ages that were founded entirely on the passing of power from father to son, whatever the merits or abilities of the child. Gibbon famously marks the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire with Marcus Aurelius's sentimental choice of his son Commodus not another, more capable man to succeed to the *Imperium* in 177 AD. The choice ended five successive transfers of power from the emperor to a man chosen on merit not kinship. The 100-year period of the so called five good emperors marks the height of Roman power, wealth and stability. History has shown again and again that the ship of state is well sailed when leadership is based on great ability, and runs against the rocks when it is based upon mere birth.

The Roman monarchy was now dead, never to return. The story that continues is that of the Roman Republic as it begins to trace its long march through the Italian peninsula, across the Mediterranean and into legend.



- ① CAPITOLINE
- ② PALATINE
- ③ CAELIAN
- ④ AVENTINE

- ⑤ QUIRINAL
- ⑥ VIMINAL
- ⑦ ESQUILINE

Chapter 4

The Public Thing

509 BC

It had been 200 years since the founding of Rome and since that time the Romans had undergone a massive transformation. In the beginning they were a collection of pastoral herdsmen and unsavory cast-offs, making their way in the world by flock and trade. Since that time they had learned to become settled farmers, tilling the land and raising crops. They had gone from being a collection of armed rabble to a society of laws with a well-equipped, well-disciplined army. They had gone from upstart village to regional capital and stood ready to challenge a wider pool of neighbors for control of all Italy. The Etruscans lay to the north and the Greeks to the south. Having conquered the central lowlands during the reign of the kings the Romans now turned to the hills and mountains of east Italy for fresh conquests and as always, were forced to parry the thrusts of the Etruscan cities to the north. This is the world into which the republic was born.

According to the legendary chronology the kings were overthrown in 509 BC, though the date is highly suspect. Most likely later, patriotic Roman historians changed the timing of the event to slightly predate the establishment of democracy in Athens by Cleisthenes in 508 BC. The Romans had a hard time believing they were not first and best in everything, especially in the democracy they took so much pride in, so they altered their history to outdo the Greeks. However, without any concrete data it is hard to know exactly when the kings were driven out, so we are forced to mark our own histories of the city with the 509 date. As I said in part one, the sack of Rome by the Gauls in 389 BC destroyed all primary documentation and so we are left with a mixture of legend and historical fiction.

Who are the Romans?

Before getting into the story of the early Republic I want to pause for a moment and establish who exactly we are talking about here. While we have discussed the “Romans”, I have not done much to describe the varying nature of the population. Were they some homogeneous hive mind who agreed on everything and acted with a single will? No. Quite the opposite. There were rich Romans and poor Romans and middle class Romans. There were men and women and children. There were slaves and freed slaves and immigrants and criminals and honest men who worked hard every day and lazy men who did not. There were prostitutes and vestal virgins, intellectuals and illiterates. Just like any society the city of Rome was inhabited by a vast array of individuals each with their own world-view, motivation and dream. And just like in any society “the Romans” did not always get along with one another and, in fact, often fought bitterly with one another for control and freedom from control.

At the foundation of the Republic, the population of Rome was around 130,000. This population was divided into two basic groups: the patricians and the plebeians. Simply put, the patricians came from those families who could trace their roots back to the original 100 senators chosen by Romulus and the plebeians came from those that could not. Generally speaking the distinction between patrician and plebeian also followed economic class divisions, though, as we will see, it was never that simple. In the early days, the political weight of the classes was inversely related to their numerical size. The smaller group of patricians held power over the larger group of plebeians. The two richest classes in Rome held enough votes to snuff out any possible opposition, and those classes were, for the most part, made up of the patricians, so the patricians made the rules. In the beginning then, the democratic republic was really an oligarchy of wealthy, aristocratic families who shaped policy to serve their interests and who had no intention of ever letting anyone else into the decision making process. It is hardly surprising that this system caused animosity. It did not take long for the plebeians, especially those who were wealthy, to demand a greater voice in government. The tension between the patricians and the plebeians would dominate Roman politics for the duration of the empire.

Outside of the basic patrician/plebeian dichotomy were those without even nominal political standing: namely women, slaves, and immigrants. These groups formed a majority in sheer numerical terms, but were denied almost all political rights. Even the plebeian males, who howled righteously at the injustice of being denied a say in

government would have cried just as loud if someone had suggested suffrage being extended to women, slaves or immigrants. Such an idea would have been beyond comprehension. The contradictions of the Early Republic bear a striking resemblance to the contradictions of the early United States. The United States, though rhetorically cloaked in the language of freedom and equality, only allowed white landowning males to vote. Eventually the property-less men agitated against the injustice of an oligarchical elite trampling on their freedoms and earned the same right, but women, blacks, Indians and new immigrants were left in the cold — present but unheard. This was Rome. A republic in which the disenfranchised majority were ruled by a disproportionately powerful elite.

Patrician or plebeian, the majority of Romans were, by this time, settled farmers. The land was owned by an elite minority and worked by the rest of the population. Economics and politics coincided just as they do today and the tension between owner and operator mirrored the tension between patrician and plebeian. Plebeians were constantly agitating for land redistribution and patricians blocked reform whenever they could. In this early stage of the empire the actual work on the farms was still done by lower class citizens, slaves being an important part of the Roman economic model, but not yet the keystone upon which the entire system was based.

The farms produced two basic products, food for internal consumption, usually grain and cereals and crops for external trade, usually olives and grapes and their refined offspring, oil and wine.

The Romans, building on the routes already established by the Etruscan used savvy trade policies to enrich themselves with all manner of foreign goods, establishing a truly international flavor in the city. As in so many other aspects of Roman society though, it was the wealthy patricians who controlled the import/export boards and it was they who benefited most from foreign trade. Needless to say the landless plebeian who worked in the fields did not dress in African finery and eat off Greek silverware.

Establishing the Republic

The tyranny of monarchy had been banished forever. It was decided (by patrician senators and equites hammering out the details, because it was really them making all these early decisions, the lower classes and plebs had nothing to do with it) that two men should rule annually to avoid any single man accumulating too much power. Originally these men were called praetors, though the title would be changed in the early 300s BC to the more familiar consul. To avoid confusion caused by changing titles I will use the latter designation even for the early executives who were technically praetors, because the office itself did not change, just the name and most translations of early Roman history refer to them as consuls anyway — so for the sake of simplicity the praetors who ruled Rome will be referred to as consuls. For the Romans, ensuring freedom was not so much a matter of scaling back or limiting the power of the executive, as the founding fathers of the United States of America sought to do with their system of checks and balances, as it was a matter of limiting the length of time within which absolute rule could be wielded. The consuls had all the same powers a king had, near absolute power over war and peace, life and death, they just had to give it up after a year. The second consul was the one check the Romans did add to the system. One consul could veto the actions of the other and that was that. Any consul who tried to run away with power could be stopped at a word from his colleague. If the two conspired to oppress the people, their terms of office expired after a year and they were back to being mere citizens, with all the legal weight that would be brought down upon two men who sought to make themselves kings. In the end, it was the expiring term of office that really let the Romans sleep well at night, the sharing of executive power was a useful novelty.

In the year of 509 BC, this was as far as the Republic had gone constitutionally. Rather than the Comitia Centuriata getting together and electing a king who served for life, they got together and elected two men who served for one year. The first two consuls were Lucius Junius Brutus and Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, the former led the revolt against the king and the latter's raped wife had sparked the event. Brutus's first act was to make all the men swear an oath that they should never again allow a king to rule Rome. As you can see the legacy of Numa remained a potent force, for Brutus felt the sacred oath before Jupiter would be enough to bind the men to opposing monarchy, and barring a few exceptions it did. The Romans did not mess around with their oaths.

There was, however an immediate problem. Collatinus, you will

note, bore the hated moniker Tarquinius, being a relative of the overthrown king. The population, jittery in their newfound freedom, worried that lust for power was an inherent trait of the Tarquins and immediately regretted their election of Collatinus, despite the fact that he had helped lead the revolution and vocally denounced his cousins. When pressed, Collatinus agreed to resign from the consulship for the sake of the stability and viability of the new republic, despite everyone thinking that it was ridiculous to do so. In his place another ringleader of the revolt was elected: Publius Valerius, who will shortly earn the honorarium Publicola, or “friend of the people” for his service to Rome. Students of American history will immediately recognize Publius’s name. The Federalist Papers, written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay in defense of the newly written constitution appeared in print under the pseudonym Publius in honor of this consul’s role in securing Rome’s new republic. Publius is often cited as being one of the original consuls of Rome, but we should remember Collatinus and his selfless

Latium: Rome and her neighbors



resignation in the face of baseless and superficial fears for the sake of his country's freedom.

Counter-revolution and Invasion

The first threat the new republic faced was the first threat all successful revolutions face, namely counter revolution. There were more than a few Romans who had lived just fine under the kings and were in no mood to lose their privileged position in society. A collection of young nobles, including two sons of Consul Brutus, conspired with envoys from exiled King Tarquin to betray the city to him and reinstate the monarchy. The plot was revealed by one of the noble's slaves and the entire group was arrested. Brutus was shocked to see his own sons involved in the affair, but incontrovertible evidence was produced that confirmed their guilt. The penalty for treason was severe, and despite his tortured misgivings, Brutus would not stop the sentence from being carried out. The young conspirators were tied to a post, scourged and then beheaded. Brutus's decision was long lauded by the Romans as a patriotic sacrifice, teaching a moral lesson about putting the welfare of the state before even one's own family, though the ruthlessness of the act is often difficult for us to similarly applaud.

The second threat the new republic faced was the second threat all successful revolutions face, namely invasion by an opportunistic enemy trying to take advantage of a neophyte central government. Tarquin had by this time taken refuge in Veii and pleaded with the nobility there to aid him in reconquering Rome. He argued that the virus of republicanism might infect Etruria and wipe out all the royal families in the region. The nobles of Veii were indeed worried about their subjects catching the freedom bug and, believing that Rome's leadership would be shaky and disjointed without a strong king in charge, agreed to aid Tarquin. However, to the surprise and consternation of Tarquin and the Veiiites, Brutus and Publius proved to be extremely capable commanders, easily routing the army from Veii.

The battle was not without tragedy for the Romans though. In the middle of the fight Brutus, liberator of Rome, was killed. His body was borne back to the city and Rome went into mourning for a full year. Publius Valerius now stood alone and, like Collatinus before him, soon fell under suspicion of the fickle and paranoid masses.

After the battle with the Veiiites, Publius began building a home atop the Velia, a ridge jutting from the north side of the Palatine hill. The people suspected him of constructing a fortress from which he would safely enslave them all. Publius caught wind of the sentiment and called a mass meeting, shaming the populace for their irrational fears and announcing that if it worried them so much he would move

his home to the bottom of the hill where they could all keep watch on him. He further used the opportunity provided by the meeting to propose two new laws, which made him a hero to the now assuaged masses and earned him the aforementioned title *Publicola*. The first stated that any man who tried to make himself king could be killed at any time by any other man without fear of reprisal and the second stated that any decision by the magistrates could be appealed to the people's assemblies. Publius, content with the single credit he received for these democratic initiatives, then called for an election to fill the open consulship. Marcus Horatius Pulvillus was eventually elected after a short detour through a consul who was elected but then died from old age a few days later. So closed the first year of the Republic, leadership settled, the people mollified and Rome secure.

In the coming years the tension between patrician and plebeian would dominate Roman public life in, the patricians wary always of runaway mob rule and the plebeians seeing no practical difference between the overthrown king and the newly empowered Senate. Next we will jump headlong into this so called "Conflict of the Orders" and witness the plebs voting with their feet and demanding a real voice in the allegedly democratic republic they had all fought so hard to establish and keep.

Chapter 5

Trials and Tribunelations

509 – 494 BC

After expelling its last king, Tarquinius Superbus in 509 BC, Rome went from being a typical Italian kingdom to an atypical Italian republic. Though the actual workings of the republic were not as democratic as they appeared on the surface, the fact remained that monarchy had been abolished and annual elections now determined leadership. The first years after the change would prove difficult for the new Roman government, as it faced both internal dissension and external invasion. Those years would see the final defeat of the Tarquins, the re-subjugation of Latium and finally the extension of political rights to the plebeians with the creation of the office of tribune, the plebeian answer to the patrician consulship.

After his Veiite army was defeated the former king, Tarquin, next took refuge in the Etruscan city of Clusium, under the protection of its king, Lars Porsena. Tarquin begged Porsena to attack the Romans, repeating his line about the threat democracy posed to royalty everywhere and the necessity of returning a king to the throne. Porsena, like the Veiites no doubt took this argument under advisement, but when he agreed to make war with the Romans, he did so, ultimately, for his own reasons. There are two accounts of what happened next. Either Porsena invaded and was successfully repulsed or he invaded and captured the city. Roman folk tales allege the former, the latter is supported by modern historical analysis.

Mythic Folk Heroes

According to the legendary tradition Porsena, in defense of his fellow Etruscan king Tarquin, marched south and was met by Roman forces at the Tiber. The Roman forces, seeing the size of the Etruscan army, fled back across the river, leaving the bridge, and therefore the city, unguarded. A single Roman soldier named Horatius, realizing he could not prevent the army's flight, ordered men to set fire to the bridge in order to prevent the Etruscans from crossing and sacking the city. To buy time he stood alone on the far side of the bridge and challenged the whole of Porsena's army to combat. While the dumbstruck Etruscans tried to figure out what they should do with this crazy, brave, but clearly suicidal soldier, the other Romans set fire to the wooden bridge. The Etruscans were finally snapped out of their stupor when the burning bridge collapsed into the river. They attacked, but Horatius jumped into the river and swam unscathed to the other side, saving the city and joining the pantheon of great Roman heroes.

Continuing the Roman myth, Porsena was forced to initiate a siege, which proved no more effective than his initial assault, again due to the bravery of a single Roman citizen. This time it was Mucius Scaevola who proved his valor and secured ultimate victory for Rome. The city was suffering under Porsena's siege and showed no signs of being able to fight it off. Mucius, taking matters into his own hands, crossed over to the Etruscan camp. He made his way to Porsena's headquarters and waited for an opportunity to strike. When Porsena's entourage emerged Mucius attempted to assassinate the king, but, unsure of which was his target, mistakenly attacked one of the king's secretaries. Mucius was seized and dragged before the shaken king.

What happened next would be the stuff of Roman legend and a moral story to inspire generation upon generation of future citizens. Mucius told the king that the Romans had declared war not on the men of Clusium, but upon Porsena personally and that he was merely the first in a long line of assassins who would not stop until the king was dead. The king, unnerved by this idea ordered Mucius burned alive and found himself only further unnerved by what Mucius did next. The Roman stuck his right hand into the fire, and, without flinching, allowed his hand to burn. He declared that such was the regard Roman men held for their bodies and that the king should remember what lay in store for him. Porsena was impressed and scared by this display. He freed Mucius and commended him for his bravery. Not wishing to live his life under a death sentence from a bunch of psychotic, patriotic assassins, he made peace with Rome and lifted the siege, never having taken the city. Such was official legend.

Victory for Lars Porsena?

Other, non-Roman sources, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, tell a different, more plausible story. In this version Porsena did indeed take Rome in the turbulent years after the founding of the republic and set up a puppet government. This outcome seems reasonable in that the Etruscans of Clusium would have been much stronger and far better equipped than the Romans were at this point, and resistance would have been futile at best. The reason Porsena, who is a confirmed historical figure, invaded Rome is a further divide between fact and legend. The melodrama of Tarquin's plea for Etruscan solidarity is pure fiction, as is the decisiveness of individual Roman bravery. Population upheaval in Italy around 500 BC had resulted in an estrangement between Etruria and their Greek trading partners in the south. Specifically, Etruscan trade routes were disrupted by the Volscians, a central Italian hill-tribe who settled the plains between Etruria and Magna Graecia south of Rome, and Porsena's conquest of the Romans was just a step in a greater project of maintaining the safety of the southern trade roads from attack. Disabusing the notion that the war was waged on Tarquin's behalf, Porsena left his son in charge of matters in Latium after defeating Rome. His son, though, was defeated by an army of allied Latins and driven back north, re-securing Roman independence as an unintended by-product. The Latin communities emerged strongly from the encounter and Rome was humbled, setting up a major confrontation for control of central Italy that would ultimately see Rome re-emerge as the dominant force in Latium for the next 150 years.

The Latins take their Shot

The Latins had chafed under Roman rule during the reign of the Tarquins and took the opportunity presented by Rome's weakened position to attempt a redrawing of the political landscape. Disorganized by Porsena's invasion and a lack of internal political unity, Rome seemed easy pickings for the emboldened Latins. However, they underestimated Rome's will, a common mistake made by enemies of the city for years to come. An alliance of Latin communities broke from the Romans and forced the issue into an armed conflict, which they thought would see them master Rome, but instead it led them right back under the yolk. A decisive battle was fought near Lake Regillus, south-east of Rome, and although the details of the confrontation are unimportant, the Battle of Lake Regillus in 496 BC is significant for two reasons. It ended Latin resistance to Rome for another 150 years (until Rome was again seen as vulnerable enough to resist due to a drawn out conflict with the Samnites). Secondly, it marked the first time that a dictator led a Roman army into battle.

The Dictatorship

The office of dictator was a curious instrument to find within the constitution of a republic, but the Romans felt that extraordinary emergencies called for extraordinary solutions, and dictators were appointed periodically over the years when such emergencies arose. A dictator was appointed when all the red tape needed to be cut through and one single man needed to take decisive action immediately without complaint, appeal or challenge. According to law, a dictator could be appointed for a single six month term at the end of which he would resign and power would revert to the consuls. At the beginning of his term the dictator appointed a vice-dictator, called his Master of the Horse, who was accountable to no one but the dictator himself.

The Romans were sufficiently concerned by the hostility of the Latins that they appointed a dictator to lead the army for the first time. Technically the first dictator ever had been a man named Titus Lartius, who had served briefly in that position two years earlier to quell internal riots, but beyond trivia, the event hardly bears mentioning. The appointment of Aulus Postumius, however, was a watershed moment. Lartius's appointment had been a ploy used by the patricians to scare the plebeians, which of course it did, but there was never any question of actually investing him with dictatorial powers for any period of time. Postumius, however, was given the keys to the city and told to do whatever was necessary to defeat the Latins, essentially making him a law unto himself. Postumius did indeed lead the army to victory over the Latins and then in a remarkable display of constitutional loyalty, stepped down from the heady heights of absolute dictatorship and restored the consuls to their rightful positions. The remarkable surrender of power demonstrates both Postumius's personal honor and the extent to which Rome as a whole probably would have cried out for his murder if he had considered remaining in power. The monarchy really was dead. Though dictators would be appointed on and off for the next 450 years, it was not until Julius Caesar that a dictator did not ultimately resign of his own free will.

The Latins reconquered and the dictatorship passed, Rome found itself at peace. However, as a general rule, whenever Rome found itself at peace abroad it immediately found itself divided at home. The question of plebeian rights, never satisfactorily settled, now reared its head once again. The plebeians were not to be put off this time, no amount of patrician chicanery and backroom dealing would break their solidarity, only rights guaranteed by law would satisfy them now. The plebeians would ultimately win political concessions from

the patricians, though it took the first recorded strike in history to do so.

The Secession of the Plebs

Trouble arose over the matter of debt-bonding. In Roman law at the time, if a debtor could not pay a creditor, then he became a bonded servant to the creditor until the debt was repaid. This system of indentured servitude essentially made permanent slaves of the debtors because, while servants to the creditors they were unable to earn any money to pay off their debts. Many of the soldiers who fought the recent war against the Latins found themselves bonded in this way. The practice in this case was especially egregious because the debts were incurred while the men were off fighting in patriotic defense of the city. The plebeians agitated for debt relief, but were rebuffed by the patricians, whose attitude was basically, 'you take on the debt, you pay the price.' Offended by this high-handed treatment, the plebeians were on the verge of full-blown revolt when the city suddenly found itself under attack from all sides.

The Sabines, Volscians and Aequians all began making forays into Roman territory, and the Senate called for armies to be raised. The plebeians sensed an opportunity and when the consuls began calling names for enlistment not one of them made a move. The Senate was beside itself at this mass act of treason and immediately appointed a dictator to smash the resistance.

However, in an amazing display of moderation and wisdom, they appointed the brother of Publius Publicola, Manlius Valerius, whom the plebeians loved, to the office. Valerius begged the plebeians to do their duty and enlist, promising that once hostilities were concluded the issue of debt relief would be addressed straightaway. Swayed by Valerius they relented and legions were formed. In due course all three foreign threats were put down and the legions returned to Rome. Back in the city however, Valerius was unable to fulfill his promise. The patrician senators blocked his attempts at debt relief, and Valerius resigned his office, laying at the senate's feet all domestic turmoil that would ensue as a result of their decision. The disbanded legionaries were outraged at the betrayal and took an extraordinary step that would become known to history as the "Secession of the Plebeians". The soldiers marched *en masse* to the Sacred Mount, a hill three miles from Rome and set up a fortified camp refusing to return to the city until their demands were met. The population of the city flew into a panic. The remaining plebeians feared retaliatory violence from the patricians and conversely the patricians feared runaway mob violence without the army to maintain order. And most of all they both feared an external invasion. If word got out that Rome's army had abandoned her, every two-bit tribe in the neighborhood would come knocking

and the city would be at their mercy. So the senate relented and sent an envoy to the plebeian camp to broker a deal. The settlement did not address the debt question directly, rather, a new office was created to shield the plebeians from future patrician tyranny: the Tribune.

The Tribune of the Plebs

The dangerous precedent set by the strike was pointed out to the plebeians by the patrician envoy who compared the republic to a body. It is true, he told them, the hands and feet and mouth could join forces and stop working for the lazy stomach who sat there greedily receiving all the food the other parts worked for, but if they were to do so the entire body would die of starvation, for the stomach pumped energy back out into the limbs. The plebeians would be granted more rights to end the secession, the envoy said but they must not think, in the future, that starving the stomach was in their enlightened best interest.

The plebeians took some note of this, but were so absorbed with their success that it is doubtful the lesson fully sank in.

The role of tribune was defensive in nature. Two plebeian men would be elected each year to act as a counterweight to the consuls. Initially the power of the tribunes was modestly held to the right to free any man from patrician imprisonment, though in the future they would gain the right to veto any law passed by the consuls or the senate at a word. The tribunes were also granted sacrosanctity, or the right to be free from harm. The plebeians took a solemn oath to kill any man who attempted to assault a tribune and more than once the oath was fulfilled. The tribunate would become a flashpoint for Roman politics for the remainder of the republic. The eventual power to veto led to a number of showdowns with the patricians, both sides bloodying themselves in their attempts to control state policy. The power of the office would peak with the Gracchi brothers, around 125 BC and fall into obsolescence with the ascension of the Caesars, but for the bulk of the republican period it was an important and powerful office.

The Secession of the Plebeians occurred in 494 BC, about 15 years after the birth of the republic. Though domestic combustion and foreign invasion were constant threats, the republic had passed through its infancy and emerged as an adolescent power ready for fresh challenges. Any threat posed by the ex-king, Tarquin, was gone and monarchy was firmly in the past. A republican army had suppressed the revolt by the Latin communities and Rome had managed to maintain control of Latium, just as it had while a monarchy. The patricians and the plebeians were settled in an uneasy alliance, and the population was more or less at peace with itself.

Next we will cover the final piece of the republican puzzle: The Law of the Twelve Tables. We will also discuss the rising threat posed

by the Volscians, leading to Rome's first concerted forays into the eastern hills where they would fight the wars that would ultimately win them control of all Italy.

Chapter 6

The Twelve Tables

494 – 451 BC

The establishment of the tribunes granted the plebeians some nominal political rights — or at the very least some protection in the political arena. This stopped plebeian agitation for a while, but as the years passed a new generation came of age and demanded further protection from the ever present threat of patrician tyranny. It was not enough to be protected from an abuse of the law, because at the time, nobody knew exactly what the law was. The legal framework of Rome was a nebulous body of oral and written traditions with precedents and sub clauses hiding all over the place, in official decrees, letters, pronouncements and most dangerously of all — in the minds of old patrician lawyers. Who was to say a man was being treated unjustly if no one knew exactly what justice was? This new generation of plebeian agitators would ultimately win a great victory for themselves and the rule of law, giving the Romans a set of written precepts that would be memorized by every child and recited by every adult: The Twelve Tables of Roman Law.

This official codification of the law occurred around 451 BC, so before discussing the Twelve Tables, let's look at the 40 odd years between the inception of the tribunate and the creation of the Twelve Tables.

Unifying Warfare

Internally, Rome was full of tension, but, as I said for the first 20 years or so it did not disrupt the day to day, year to year operations of the city. The consuls and senate still held the lion's share of the power, though they were now checked somewhat by the tribunes.

Roman unity was maintained by an unceasing series of wars against their neighbors to the north, east and south. To the north, they fought a particularly hard campaign against their old nemesis the Veiiites, that ended in a stalemate in 474 BC after a campaign that came complete with a dressed up Battle of Thermopylae, with 306 members of the noble Fabii family cast in the role of King Leonidas and his doomed Spartans.

The battles fought to the east and south were of a different sort and revolved around a geographically based cultural class. Veii may have been in competition with Rome, but at least it was a settled city of civilized farmers. Out in the eastern hills nomadic tribes, particularly the Volscians and Aequians, pressed at Rome's borders. The nomadic herdsman coveted Rome's soft, flat land and tried every year to carve out some or all of Roman territory and turn it from parceled farms into a massive grazing zone. As a result, the Romans were constantly beating back encroachment by the tribes, who occasionally mustered enough force to give the Romans a run for their money, but were usually easily dispatched.

Coriolanus

For the first ten years after the Secession of the Plebeians, and running concurrently with the on again off-again battles with Veii, the Volscians posed the greatest danger to the Roman Republic. They had already made great inroads south of the city, effectively securing all the land between the hills and the sea, blocking trade with Magna Graecia. The peak of the Volscian threat came early, in 491 BC, when a disgruntled Roman General named Coriolanus defected and led a Volscian army through the legions and right to the gates of the city. The Roman men beaten, the women were sent to plead with Coriolanus to end his attack; it was only after a personal appeal from his own mother that Coriolanus's heart finally turned and he withdrew the army. His Volscian officers were appalled at being denied their easy victory and back in Volscian territory murdered their Roman leader. It has been noted that the story of Coriolanus bears a striking resemblance to the story of the great Athenian general Themistocles and that the story was probably inserted later to account for the defeats suffered by Rome at the hands of nomadic rabble. The Roman ego demanded that Romans could only be defeated by other Romans. By the mid-480s BC though, the Volscian threat had been largely contained and the city was never seriously threatened again, though the Volscians maintained control over the southern plains for the remainder of the century and were a constant menace along Rome's border.

Plebeian Agitation

Throughout the 470s and 460s BC, even though the external danger had been greatly diminished, the legions still went out every summer campaigning against the latest forays by Volscian or Aequian raiders. The total military dominance of Rome over the hill tribes eventually led the plebeian leaders to suspect that the patricians were not being totally honest about the threat posed by the tribes. Given the record the Roman army had, it is hard to blame them. Without even breaking a sweat, the legions dispatched every enemy they encountered. A political pattern began to emerge. A plebeian leader would decry the raising of yet another army to go do battle with the Volscians or whomever, even though they posed no serious threat. The plebeians would denounce the senate for starting wars to put off questions of further economic and political reform. These leaders would always, in turn, be denounced by the senate as self-absorbed traitors who were putting personal ambition ahead of Rome's safety. The plebeian leaders would shoot back that the patricians were sending men out to die for no other reason than to tighten their grip on wealth and power. A stand-off would ensue but Rome, being what it was, would ultimately raise the legions and the plebeian demagogues would be silenced. The Romans were soldiers and fighting is what they did.

Throughout these years Rome's position vis-à-vis the nomadic herdsman was never seriously threatened, though in the following century Rome would fight a drawn out war with a rising hill tribe called the Samnites that would see all Italy eventually fighting on one side or the other.

In the years after the Secession of the Plebeians there were essentially two major initiatives that excited the plebeians and kept the patricians up at night. The first was proposed by a tribune named Volero in 473 BC. It stated simply that the tribunes ought to be elected by the Tribal Assembly and not by the Comitia Centuriata as they had been in the first years after the office was created. The patricians balked at the idea, knowing full well that they would no longer have undue weight in choosing who would be tribune. The patricians inevitably failed in their attempt to quash the proposal and election of the tribunes was duly passed on to the Comitia Tributa. As if this wasn't bad enough, in 462 BC a tribune named Tarentillus made an even more radical proposal: the laws of Rome should be written down and posted so that all citizens would be bound to the same codes and no man could rise above them. The patricians were horrified at the thought and spent the next ten years doing everything in their power to stop its implementation.

It was during these years that the plebeians really started to resist military service and openly question patrician motives. At one point however, caught up in their own rhetoric they failed to believe it when the senate woke up one morning and announced that during the night that a small Sabine army had penetrated the city gates and taken the citadel. It was only after a desperate plea by the consuls that the plebeians finally agreed to raise an army, finding much to their surprise that the citadel had in fact been taken and their city was under siege. The legions, along with a contingent of local allies, easily dislodged the Sabines, the greatest casualty of the encounter being what little influence the tribunes had so recently achieved. The patricians managed to put off Tarentillus's proposal for another ten years.

In the end though, they were forced to relent. Political consciousness had been raised by travelers from the south, who brought with them word of Solon's political reforms in the great Greek city of Athens and the proponents of reform beat a steady drum. Finally, a combination of plague, famine and the economically destabilizing introduction of coins as a medium of exchange in 454 BC led to a crisis of confidence in the leadership and something had to be done to assuage the masses. It was agreed in 451 BC that consular power for the year would be transferred to a body of 10 men, called the decemvirate whose main task would be to collect and condense Roman law into a single uniform code, to be published on bronze tablets in the forum for all to see.

The Twelve Tables

Unfortunately the total contents of the twelve tables (each posted on a separate bronze tablet, hence the name) have been lost to history and all we have to rely on are occasional excerpts and summaries by later Roman authors. We know generally what topics each table covered and the range and detail gives a fascinating insight into the Roman mind. Held within the tables, written 2500 years ago we find the basis for many of our own founding legal principles. For example, the ninth table explicitly forbids passage of laws against specific individuals, a principle still in force today, while the first table establishes the sanctity of the subpoena or the requirement to appear before a court.

The tables covered a wide range of matters from lawsuit procedures, to payment of debts, to inheritance rights, to the upkeep of public sewers, to divorce and property boundary issues. While much of these laws is legalistic, they do reveal some of the more curious facets of the Roman legal mind. For example, according to the eighth table, a thief caught at night may be killed without penalty, but if the same thief is caught during the day he must be delivered unharmed to the magistrates. Contained within the same table we discover what the penalty was for throwing an unaimed weapon into a crowd: the accused was fined one ram. The seventh table states that fruit that falls from a tree onto a neighbor's property shall be the property of that neighbor, a provision which demonstrates just how scrupulously litigious the Romans could be. Death was the ultimate penalty and was prescribed for a number of crimes including murder and the destruction of crops, but also, interestingly, for matters involving the integrity of the courts. Magistrates who take bribes to influence their decisions as well as witnesses who lie were both ordered to be flung from a high cliff. To the Romans, perjury was a heinous crime that threatened the entire community. The final provision of interest was hidden deep in the ninth table, a piece of fine print that, once discovered outraged the plebeians and led to violent class confrontations: no patrician shall be allowed to marry a plebeian. Effectively this codified a limitation on upward social mobility to the majority of the population and guaranteed that none of them would ever hold the most powerful office of state: the consulship.

The twelve tables were the foundation of later Roman law and were memorized by all citizens, literate or not. The existence of a written body of law was not a Roman innovation, nor did it make them unique in the ancient world, but it did put them into a select

group of states that valued the objectivity of the law over the subjectivity of capricious rulers.

Tyranny of the Decemvirs

The story of the decemvirs, the magistrates tasked with the compilation ends with an interesting bit of legendary melodrama. During the year (or two depending on the source) that the decemvirs were in office they held ultimate authority. The unbroken chain of consular elections had been broken and effectively a new form of government was briefly ushered in. Rather than rule by two men, it was rule by ten men. Among those ten men, one was first among equals, a man named Appius Claudius. Claudius came from a family of staunch patricians, and was a vigorous opponent of just about any proposed plebeian reform. After finishing their appointed task, the decemvirate had lost its *raison d'être* and was set to disband, but Claudius, enjoying his newfound power convinced his colleagues that they should remain in office after their term expired. The other decemvirs, similarly enjoying the trappings of power, agreed and when the consular elections for that year arrived, the decemvirate simply did not allow anyone to stand and no elections were held. The people found themselves unexpectedly in a constitutional crisis. Even though Claudius and the decemvirs had made a naked power grab there was no legal avenue available to stop them, for the decemvirate had been invested with all judicial authority. Ironically, the body of men who laid down the laws were the first to blatantly ignore them.

Days and weeks passed with the decemvirate maintaining their illegal hold on power until finally Claudius went too far and the entire city rose in revolt. Claudius had his eye on a beautiful plebeian girl who was set to be married to a young army officer. Claudius declared out of the blue that the girl in question was an escaped slave owned by one of his clients and that she must be returned at once. A hearing was called to decide the case, and numerous witnesses were brought forwards attesting to the free born status of the young woman, but the trial was overseen by Claudius who, to the astonishment of everyone present, ruled that the girl was indeed an escaped slave and was the property of the complaining client, despite obvious evidence to the contrary.

The people were appalled at this absurd conclusion and the army, when it caught wind of the decision, joined in their outrage. The husband-to-be and father of the woman were both officers in good standing and the army was incredulous at the arbitrary injustice of Claudius toward one of their own. The people, supported by the army, then used their bargaining chip of last resort and abandoned the city, removing themselves to the Sacred Mount just as they had done forty years earlier. The decemvirs, recognizing that their position was

untenable, finally resigned. Claudius was arrested, but rather than face trial he killed himself. Regular consular elections then took place and Rome's domestic tranquility was restored. The plebeians actually emerged from the ordeal better off than they had been, for in their negotiations to return to the city, they demanded that the number of tribunes be raised to ten, and the senate, anxious to get things back to normal and again fearing invasion, agreed. Furthermore, the codification of the laws, which had been a plebeian demand for several decades, had already been completed, leaving them in a much stronger position legally to fend off future patrician tyranny.

The creation of the twelve tables left the plebeians on the one hand overjoyed, but on the other some of the provisions horrified them. True the rule of law would now dominate patrician subjectivity, but that one sticking point of the illegality of patrician-plebeian marriage opened their eyes to oppression they never knew existed. Only patricians could be consuls or hold other high magistracies, including pontifex maximus. If no plebeian could ever marry a patrician then no plebeian would ever hold high office and the patricians would always and forever hold the winning political hand. The next cycle of patrician-plebeian conflict would revolve around this very issue eventually leading to a number of reforms that further diluted the patrician stranglehold on power.

Chapter 7

The Roman Washington

519 – 430 BC

Having looked at the political development of Rome and the establishment of the Twelve Tables in 451 BC and the subsequent expulsion of the decemvirs, now I want to step back a few years to focus on the life of one man who was prominent in this period, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus. Cincinnatus has passed into the collective memory as a paradigm of republican virtue, even though the decisive moments of his life were almost certainly invented by later historians to embellish his famous career. Still, his biography continues to resonate and is a pretty good tale of a humble man who had absolute power thrust upon him and then, remarkably, relinquished that power and returned to his plow. A man who sacrificed everything for the republic.

Republican Youth

Cincinnatus was born around 519 BC, while the kings still reigned, and was just a boy when Brutus and Collatinus expelled the Tarquins. He was therefore one of the first citizens in Rome who lived his entire life under a republican government, without strong memories of the monarchy. He was part of the vanguard of a critical generation. His elders remembered vividly the tyranny of Tarquin and their steadfast republican principles reflect a personally developed hatred of monarchy. They were victims and would do anything to avoid being victims again. Cincinnatus however, and those of his generation, never personally experienced this victimization. Once they came of age the republic would have to sink or swim on its own merit. If a would-be tyrant began to acquire too much power there would be no one to turn to and say, 'hey, remember Tarquin, this guy's trying to be another Tarquin,' because no one would be left who actually remembered Tarquin. It is in this passing from living memory that the mistakes of history repeat themselves. Ambitious men of later generations might attempt to seize power and, believing their times to be unique, a cowering population might allow it. In those times only vigilance born of a love of the republic, not a hatred of monarchy, would save the people from slavery, and Cincinnatus was amongst the first to set down that love of the republic for its own sake.

Patrician Champion

To dispel one myth straightway, Cincinnatus was at no point a “defender of the little guy”. He was a patrician by birth and upbringing and when he emerged on the public stage it was as a steadfast opponent of the tribunes and their reforms. His first appearance in the historical record is not a starring role, but rather a supporting part in the drama of his son Caeso. There was a great deal of civil unrest in the aftermath of Tarentillus’s proposal to codify the law, and plebeian demonstrations in the forum were often broken up by groups (or gangs if you prefer) of young patrician nobles. Caeso, an abnormally large young man, took to this with great relish, personally beating and chasing any plebeian who tried to take part in such demonstrations. Young and hot-tempered that he was though, he was easy pickings for a savvy tribune named Verginius who intentionally goaded Caeso by leading proactive public marches that would inevitably draw the wrath of the young man. Once he had enough witnesses and evidence, Verginius brought capital charges against Caeso for, well, all of the horrible things he had done. Caeso was ordered to appear at a trial and if he did not then he would be find a large sum of money. It is at this point that Cincinnatus makes his first appearance in the public record, defending his son against Verginius’s accusations and asking that the charges be dropped. Rather than face an obviously hostile and biased court, Caeso fled north to Etruria, and out of the history of Rome completely. His son having essentially jumped bail, Cincinnatus was forced to sell most of his property to pay the debt, leaving him a pauper with only a small plot of land on the far side of the Tiber.

It is from this impoverished state that Cincinnatus’s legend begins. In 460 BC, not long after the Sabines had been expelled from the citadel, Cincinnatus was chosen to serve as one of the two consuls for that year. The tribunes were less than thrilled at this development, recognizing that he was now in a position of authority over them after they had just impoverished him. Cincinnatus did nothing to ease their minds, immediately attacking the character of the plebeian leadership, which he accused of aiding and abetting the Sabine capture of the citadel with their selfish myopia.

This set the tone for the year. Struggles ensued between the consuls and the tribunes, with the senate and popular assemblies caught in the middle. Cincinnatus managed to kill Tarentillus’s bill for the year, while the tribunes banned the consuls from taking any army more than one mile beyond the city limits. By the end of the year no compromise was reached and the battle was set to continue into the

next year, but the senate passed a law stating that no magistrate, patrician or plebeian could serve in successive years. The tribunes dismissed this and had themselves re-elected, so the patricians were set to reconfirm Cincinnatus when he announced that if they were to act no better than the plebeians then they were no better than the plebeians and refused to stand for office. Agreeing reluctantly to this logic, the patricians allowed Cincinnatus to retire to his small farm. It would not be long however before he was called back to service in his most famous role: dictator of Rome.

Called From the Plow

In 458 the Aequians were causing Rome trouble and one of the consuls for the year was sent with an army to deal with them. However, the fight was much tougher than it had been in the past and the legions found themselves pinned down, unable to retreat and facing annihilation. The citizens of Rome panicked and, without dissent, a dictator was called for and Cincinnatus was named. A delegation was sent to inform the old man and famously found him at work on the small farm he had retired to, a living paradigm of Roman virtue. The delegation saluted Cincinnatus as dictator, imploring him to return to the city at once. The tribunes were appalled to see their political enemy returned in such a powerful position, but Cincinnatus was greeted in the city with such acclaim that there was little they could do but hope the old patrician would not turn his absolute power against them. Cincinnatus however was not out to settle political grudges (not yet anyway). He promptly raised an army and marched out to rescue the besieged legion. Wasting no time Cincinnatus's army swept in and decisively beat the Aequians, saving the legion and ending the threat. He marched back to Rome and celebrated his well-earned triumph a mere fifteen days after being appointed dictator. Before stepping down Cincinnatus did clear up one bit of family business, forcing Verginius to plead guilty to perjury and go into exile. Rome safe and his family's honor restored, Cincinnatus resigned the dictatorship and returned to his farm, a hero in his own time and a legend thereafter.

He would make one final appearance on the public stage 20 years later, again appointed as dictator, though this time it was to deal with internal strife not an external threat. Ironically, it was an attempt by a single man to capture total power in Rome that led to the re-appointment of Cincinnatus as dictator.

In the following chapter I will discuss Maelius and his plot to make himself king of Rome, so for now I will just leave it that a conspiracy was in motion and Cincinnatus was brought in to deal with it, which he did, as quickly as he dispatched the Aequians and again resigned the dictatorship and returned to his farm, this time for the last time.

The Myth of Cincinnatus

Cincinnatus is a *bona fide* legend, but the particulars of his life are almost certainly an invention. The man was a giant of his age and earned a little mythical embellishment. Regardless of its accuracy, the life of Cincinnatus was handed down from generation to generation and is still told today. His story had a great impact on the Enlightenment-age soldiers of the American continental army, who often referred to their leader General Washington as the American Cincinnatus. When the army was demobilized, the retired officers formed a fraternity of sorts called the Society of the Cincinnati, membership of which was limited to men who had served three years in the army. One of their members was later the territorial governor of Ohio and he renamed a growing urban hub on the Ohio River Cincinnati, both in honor of the society itself and Washington, to whom the name referred. Ironically, the society still exists today, membership being limited to sons of the original members, making it a hereditary institution, completely anathema to everything the officers had originally been commissioned to fight. But I digress.

Cincinnatus's mark has been set upon the world. Clearly, he was a towering figure in the first century of the republic: a hero, a consul and twice named dictator, but why the iconic veneration? Allegedly, it is for the act of relinquishing absolute power, but we have already seen that Cincinnatus was not the first man to do this, nor would he be the last. The office of dictator was not created especially for him, it was, in fact a constitutional role that was used regularly in times of crises. His story, of course, had a nice ring to later Romans, who reveled in his simple homespun virtue, called from his field to save the city. In the good old days, they said, the greatest man of his age was found hard at work on a small farm, not eating figs on a sofa in some Palatial estate. He was the epitome of the virtuous farmer soldier, the ideal Roman.

Two things really contribute to the fame of Cincinnatus. The first is the incidental fact that most people, myself included before I began digging, believe Cincinnatus must have either been the first Roman dictator or the only dictator to ever step down voluntarily or something equally unprecedented. Of course, there was nothing particularly unprecedented about Cincinnatus, and our veneration of him, in that case, would seem to be based upon nothing more than our own misconceptions about Roman history. However, even though Cincinnatus wasn't the first or last of anything, he was unique in a profound way. The first two dictators, who like Cincinnatus, served and then resigned, were men of a generation that remembered the

Tarquins, remembered the tyranny and would not think for a moment about seizing power for themselves after they had so recently thrown out the kings. Cincinnatus, on the other hand comes from the next generation, a generation that lived their entire lives under the republic, and was thus the first man who had no memory of monarchy and was given absolute power. The temptation to keep it would not be tempered by memories of subjugation and struggle. However, Cincinnatus's virtue returned to the people the power that was rightfully theirs. It was his resignation from the dictatorship that really cemented the precedent for later Romans to relinquish dictatorial power and maintain the republic — the thing of the people. In that case Cincinnatus does indeed deserve the praise he is given for selflessly handing the reins of power back to the people where it would remain for hundreds of years.

Next we learn more about the machinations of Maelius, a scoundrel of the highest order, as well as the events that led up to the final confrontation with Veii, a struggle that broke the back of Etruscan dominance, and which, though a victory for Rome, opened the door for the Gauls to sweep in from the north and hand the Romans their most devastating defeat, almost ending the empire before it had a chance to really begin.

Chapter 8

Decades of Gloom

450 – 425 BC

The years after the expulsion of the decemvirate were hard. Old problems returned, while new ones threatened to tear the city apart. Patrician and plebeian were at each other's throats over wealth, power and land. The population of the city was growing and there was not enough land for them nor enough food to feed them. Crop failure exacerbated the problem and famine became a persistent killer. Bitter tensions led to a breakdown of military resolve and old enemies long contained now returned, a match for their former betters. The Volscians and Aequians both peeled off Roman territory to the east and south and there was little the legions could do about it. This is how the Romans limped through the second half of the 400s BC: hungry, tired, weak and demoralized. At the turn of the century a final victory over Veii would lift the hopes, albeit briefly, of the city, but for now life was a dreary war of attrition.

In the aftermath of the publication of the Twelve Tables, the plebeians immediately became aware of an institutionalized bias against them. They were incensed to see a codification of the ban against patrician-plebeian marriage and immediately opened a new front in their war for equality. The issue of greatest concern was access to the high offices of state, meaning the consulship, the religious office of pontifex maximus and its subordinate priesthoods. Only patricians, by law, could hold these offices and if plebeians could not intermarry with patricians, they would never gain access to the highest positions of authority or have the final say in law or religion. The plebeians attacked this imbalance from two angles. First, they sought to legalize patrician-plebeian intermarriage, and second, they demanded that the consulship be open to plebeian candidates. The former would be won quickly, as to the latter, it would be just under a hundred years before the first plebeian was finally named consul in 366 BC.

Intermarriage Legalized

In 445 BC, a tribune name Canuleius introduced a bill legalizing patrician-plebeian marriage. The measure was fought by the patricians, who fretted about the dilution of pure patrician blood, but their resistance was only half-hearted. For one thing their arguments really had no leg to stand on. When it came to officiating the necessary religious sacrifices, the Romans, all of them, believed that a patrician must be the official in charge or the gods would be offended. Some patrician families claimed that mixing the two classes would inevitably offend the gods. However, in Roman law legal status followed the father's position alone, without any concept of genetic makeup. Incest, for example did not even cover relations between maternal cousins, they were simply not considered part of the same family. So claims about blood dilution came off as absurd. Any child born to a patrician father was a patrician. Flimsy arguments on blood purity aside, the matter basically came down to not wanting to share with the other children, and patrician solidarity soon cracked. A number of noble families were eyeing the fortunes the wealthy plebeian families and the measure was passed.

The Military Tribune Gambit

As to admission to the consulship, the patricians fought much harder to prevent it, and far dirtier. This was not a toy they were going to share with the other children. In 444 BC right on the heels of the plebeians gaining at least nominal access to power, the consulship was suspended and the third manifestation of executive power was inaugurated: military tribunes with consular power. The switch was not permanent, though for the next 80-odd years, the executive leadership of Rome alternated between the new military tribunes and the traditional dual consulship depending on the circumstances of a given year. Initially three military tribunes would be elected by the centuriata and granted executive authority over the state, though over the years that number rose to four then to six. The introduction of the new executive form can be seen as a move by the patricians to protect the consulship from plebeian taint. No plebeian could be consul if there were no consuls elected. The military tribunes were elected democratically by the army, and plebeians as well as patricians stood for and won election. This was fine with the patricians as long as the sanctity of the consulship itself was guarded. Furthermore, by increasing the number of executives, plebeian ambition was mollified and at the same time power was diluted so the elected plebeians were not as singularly powerful as they would have been as a consul. It also kept the plebeians from agitating too hard for admission to the consulship. For the years between 444 and 367 BC military tribunes were elected roughly half the time, the other years being governed by the traditional dual consuls.

Much has gone into analyzing what factors determined whether consuls or tribunes would be elected for a given year, but by cross referencing executive forms with military activity, a possible answer emerges. Consuls were generally in charge during the major conflicts of the era so it would seem that military tribunes were elected when no major military action was planned. Consuls were elected when engagement was imminent. This is counterintuitive, given the name military tribune, but it makes sense. Plebeians with consular power were acceptable to the patricians as long as they were destined for little more than off year administrative duties. When real action was required, the patrician controlled consulship returned. The patricians wanted to make sure that they alone determined the course of state in times of crisis. If this is true, the creation of military tribunes with consular power was a stall tactic formulated by the patricians to put off full political equality with the plebeians, which it did, for the better part of 80 years.

The Censor

A second move by the patricians further removed the plebeians from access to real power. One of the most important duties of the consuls was administering the census once every five years. The census determined citizen status as well as classification within the five-tiered system of the *Comitia Centuriata*. The consuls charged with taking the census had enormous latitude at the edges of the dividing lines to move citizens up or down, granting them a degree of control over the end voting blocks of the *centuriata*. More than that even, it was during the census that citizen status was granted or revoked.

The patricians had a keen interest in maintaining control of the census and when military tribunes were introduced, the administration of the census was peeled off from the other consular powers and invested in a new office that was destined to become one of the most coveted of all magistracies: the censor. In time the censor would acquire other duties, most famously the vague directive to protect public morals, (which would be brought to a high art by Cato the Elder, a stern, frugal and humorless statesman from the early mid-100s BC), but for now the single role of administering the census was important enough. By senatorial decree the censor had to be a patrician, ostensibly because of the religious ceremonies of the census that needed attending to, but more likely to make sure the plebeians could never engineer more favorable voting blocks for themselves in the *centuriata*.

These political reforms closed the cycle initiated by Tarentillus in 462 BC when he first proposed the creation of the Twelve Tables. The political and economic structure of Rome would not see significant alteration until the opening of the Samnite wars in the mid-300s BC, not for lack of plebeian agitation, but because the patricians seem to have closed ranks and resisted any further reforms.

King Maelius?

The following years were long and hard for Rome. Grain shortages were reported in a dozen of the next 50 years, with devastating famines following. The lack of nourishment inevitably led to plagues that further diminished the population. Rome was forced to seek help from surrounding communities, north in Etruria and south in Magna Graecia and Sicily. Their requests, however, were denied as often as they were approved and many of their neighbors reveled in Rome's misery after so many years of dominance. Just about every enemy took advantage of Rome's depleted and malnourished army and Rome's sphere of influence gradually began to erode. The Volscians and Aequians, once easily dispatched, now let their flocks graze in Roman fields uncontested.

In the midst of this desperation, some men allowed their scruples to take a back seat to ambition and one man in particular would pay the ultimate price for his hubris. A wealthy merchant named Maelius, who had never served in any important office, but was of equestrian rank, began to dream bigger than his prudence should have allowed. In 439 BC, during a typical grain famine, official Roman envoys in Etruria rejected the Etruscan price for grain as gouging and returned to the city empty handed. Maelius then went himself and agreed to pay the exorbitant cost, bring home the grain the people needed and handed it out free. Maelius was an overnight sensation, a newly minted political rock-star. Everywhere he went he was greeted by large ovations acclaiming his generosity. Maelius looked at the adoring masses and his own personal fortune and let his imagination get away from him.

He moved quickly from dream to action and began to actively conspire against the state with the intention of making himself king. The republican government, he rationalized, had failed to protect and feed the people, where he, Maelius, had succeeded, so it was only right that he should rule. He began caching weapons and bribing the plebeian leadership to rise with him when he made his move against the senate. But alas, it was not to be.

The state controller of supplies, a man named Minutius, dealt daily with the same grain merchants who dealt with Maelius and learned of the plot. He went straight to the senate, who flew into a panic recognizing their own unpopularity coupled with the people's desperate state might be enough to let tyranny slip in the back door. The senate needed a man whose fame and popularity outshone that of Maelius to put a stop to the conspiracy. As I mentioned last week they went to Cincinnatus, now well over 80 and appointed him dictator

once again. All of Maelius's careful planning was undone in a moment. Cincinnatus sent his Master of Horse to fetch Maelius and bring him forward for trial. Maelius, knowing he was in deep trouble attempted to resist the summons, and when he did the Master of the Horse cut him down where he stood. There was a brief popular uproar over the murder, but Cincinnatus legitimized the act, saying that Maelius was being summoned merely for trial and that it was his refusal to appear, not his alleged criminal activity, that sealed his fate. Political order was restored and Cincinnatus again resigned. There would be no more serious conspiracies against the state until the crisis years of the late republic.

War with Fidenae

Soon after the death of Maelius an external threat emerged that would eventually lead Rome into its final definitive clash with Veii. The city of Fidenae, an Etruscan outpost on the Roman side of the Tiber, which had been under Roman control for some time decided to revolt and called for Veii's help. They figured that Rome, weak internally and caught up in the south with intrusive tribes, would be forced to let the city go, but Rome was determined to maintain control.

Hostilities began when Fidenae, hoping to goad Rome into a battle she would lose, murdered four visiting Roman envoys. This treacherous act led to an immediate Roman response, but no conclusive action was achieved on either side. The war with Veii-backed Fidenae dragged on for years. To the Romans victory was a necessity. If they lost control of the Fidenae, trade up the Tiber River would be severely hampered but despite the Romans' best efforts, Fidenae held out and trade suffered accordingly. Through the 430s and 420s BC, Rome found itself militarily engaged on three fronts, economically isolated and politically divided. It was not a good time to be a Roman.

Some relief came around 425 BC, when the Romans finally won back control over Fidenae, but Veii itself still loomed on the horizon. The Romans, for the moment, dreaded a fight with their rival and did not follow up the recovery of Fidenae with action into Veiiite territory. A confrontation was brewing between the two powers, their political and economic destinies were on a collision course, but for the moment a tense truce prevailed. Veii seems to have been dealing with its own internal problems at the time and so did not strike when the iron was hot, immediately at the end of war, which had drained Rome physically and emotionally. This gave the Romans a chance to catch their breath and consolidate their power. When the final clash with Veii finally erupted, the Romans were in a position to challenge their Etruscan rival on an equal footing.

The Roman Way

The years leading up to the war with Veii were hard, but these decades would highlight the characteristic Roman obstinacy that would win them an empire. The Romans simply never gave up. Beaten, harassed, tired and divided, the Romans soldiered on. The Roman unwillingness to quit in the face of adversity bordered on the edge of insanity. They would accept catastrophic losses but would never surrender.

In the centuries that followed Rome was many times beaten so badly that they should have relinquished their dreams of empire and retired to the dustbin of history, but instead they buried the dead and raised a fresh army, never suing for peace and never retreating. It was this unwavering advance that so frightened Rome's enemies. In battle legionaries would fall but the line would keep marching incessantly forward — dispassionate, calm and mechanical. There was no psyching out the legions or driving them to flight, they just kept coming. If you decisively beat one Roman army, rather than surrendering like a civilized nation, the Romans raised another army and set it against you until more from exhaustion than anything else you were beaten and inexplicably found yourself under the yoke of a foe you thought you had defeated. This was the Roman way and during these hard years it was on full display.

It has often been said that of some generations much is asked and of others much is given. Of this generation much was asked and without even the promise of glory to soothe them. Their fights were not the great wars that made men famous, they were persistent skirmishes, wars of attrition, which cost lives and profited no one. The Romans of the middle Imperium, which Gibbon famously called the safest, most civilized and most comfortable period in history bear no resemblance to the thin desperate Romans of the late 400s BC, but that future was secured by the sacrifice of these early suffering generations, of whom much was asked and to whom nothing was given.

In the next chapter we will trace the final conflict with Veii, Rome's very own Trojan war, complete with a victory secured by sneak attack and introduce a giant of the early Republic: Marcus Furius Camillus, known as the second founder of Rome.

Chapter 9

A Trojan War

405 – 396 BC

Rome had defeated Fidenae and recovered its regional position. The Volscians were still a persistent menace to the south, but by this time they were clearly on the decline militarily. In another few decades Rome would finally put an end to the Volscian threat and conquer them once and for all, but for now periodic clashes continued to be a mainstay of legionary activity. The main threat to Rome, however, lay north with the city-state of Veii, long an economic, political and military rival. When not clashing with Veii directly, the Etruscan city had bankrolled Rome's enemies and fought by proxy. After years avoiding conflict because they were stretched too thin, the Romans finally felt secure enough to challenge their northern rival openly and committed themselves to a war that would determine who controlled central Italy.

Veii was the southernmost member of the Etruscan League, a loose confederation of twelve city states that controlled Italy from the Tiber to the Po valley in the north. Other members of the League included Tarquinii, birthplace of Tarquinius Priscus, the fifth king of Rome and Clusium, home of Lars Porsena who either did or did not conquer Rome. Had there been any solidarity between the cities it is doubtful Rome would have ever emerged triumphant from its war with Veii, but the League served an economic and cultural function rather than a political and military one. This failure to unite would ultimately spell the end of the Etruscans, who in addition to pressure from Rome to the south, suddenly faced the threat of migrating Gauls, who were passing through the Alps into the Po Valley and squeezing the Etruscans out of land in the north. The third prong of the assault that would mark the end of Etruscan power was the ascendancy of Syracuse, the powerful Greek city state of Sicily which bottled up the Carthaginians, who had been a long term Etruscan economic and military ally, and thus preventing any outside aid from reaching the besieged Etruscan cities. Syracuse had just put itself on the map by defeating an Athenian invasion force in 413 BC and now ambitiously sought to control all of mainland Italy.

Casus Belli

The war between Rome and Veii was inevitable. Veii lay a mere twelve miles north of Rome, far too close for two powers to coexist peacefully. Eventually, economic necessity drove both to the conclusion that the other had to be eliminated. The region was simply not big enough for the both of them.

There were three basic points of economic conflict that could not be resolved.

The first was control of the lucrative salt beds at the mouth of the Tiber. Almost all the inland communities relied on the Tiber beds as their source of salt and whoever controlled the source controlled a reliable cash cow. However, the beds lay mostly on the northern bank of the river and so were controlled by Veii. The Romans looked on with envy and for years sought to dislodge the Veiiites, but were never in a position to do so. Now it seemed the time was ripe to make their move. The Romans wanted to control the beds, but Veii was not going to give them up without a fight.

The salt trade was critical because of the economic conditions at the time. After the Etruscans had lost their foothold south of Rome to the Volscians, their direct trade connection with Magna Graecia was severed. The archaeological record shows that the flood of trade Veii had once enjoyed as the gateway to Etruria now slowed to a trickle. Their overland trade routes closed, the Veiiites had to rely on seafaring traders, most importantly their Carthaginian allies, but after the rise of Syracuse, those Carthaginian traders began to be squeezed out and Veii's economy suffered as a result. In better days, northbound trade was ample enough to be split between Veii and Rome, but now the limited supply was not enough to supply two economic centers. One had to be eliminated or both would die.

Finally, there was the basic issue of territory. Rome's population was expanding, but its territory was not. Veii controlled huge tracts of fertile land that all levels of Roman society coveted. The richest patrician and the poorest plebeian both saw the land north of the Tiber as the answer to their overpopulation crisis. The patricians wanted the land to relocate the landless plebeians, who were agitating with increasing fervor to redistribute patrician land in a more equitable manner and the plebeians just wanted land, whatever the source.

The need to control the salt markets, the need to control the sparse overland trade with Magna Graecia and the need to control the land

north of the Tiber finally drove the Romans to action and around 400 BC it was decided to take Veii out once and for all. The Veientes, equally in a bind, were more than willing to take up the fight and the final conflict was joined.

Perpetual War

The war with Veii was unlike any the Romans had undertaken so far and the struggle would change the nature and character of the Romans forever. Livy dates the conflict as taking place between 402 and 392 BC and the archaeological record tends to back this chronology, though not completely. The traditional length given for the war was ten years, but most historians agree that this number was lifted from the mythical Trojan war and that the actual conflict more likely lasted six or seven years.

Battles in the field were intermittent and inconclusive, leading the Romans to change tactics and besiege Veii itself rather than try and beat its army in the field. This forced the Romans to do something they had never before even contemplated: keeping an army in the field year round. Traditionally the campaign season lasted between April and October with soldiers returning home for the winter. It was unprecedented to keep an army enrolled past October, but after the decision was made to lay siege to Veii this is exactly what happened. The soldiers suffered this outrage only because the Senate introduced an innovation that would mark a turning point in Roman history: soldier pay. It was not a great sum, nor was it a permanent policy, but it set a precedent and marked the first step on the long road toward the establishment of a fully professional army, a road that lead directly to the death of the republic. For now, though, it was an expedient to keep an army in the field at a time when the soldiers had to return home to look after their farms. The pay alleviated the economic burden the soldiers faced and kept them fighting

The siege soon turned into a prolonged siege. The Romans wanted nothing more than a quick decisive victory, but Veii was situated in a nearly impregnable position. Bounded on three sides by cliffs, only a narrow strip of land north of the city offered a level entrance. The Romans managed to gain control of the strip and cut Veii off from the rest of the world, but they were never able to do much more than that. The Veientes were able to concentrate their total defensive capabilities on that one accessible point and so the Romans were unable to make any headway. Though not far from home (Veii was only 12 miles from Rome), the soldiers were forced to remain in camp through the winter and began to grumble at the injustice of remaining in arms. The tribunes railed against the policy, claiming that the siege was a patrician policy dedicated more to getting influential plebeians out of the city than winning the war. Look at Veii, they said, what army could possibly take it by force, it was absurd. Soldiers were kept on year after year, their farms falling into disrepair and their families

falling into poverty, all in the name of a siege that showed no promise of being brought to a successful conclusion. A great many were sympathetic to this view and the will of the army began to waver.

Marcus Furius Camillus

Into this depressed state came the one of the great heroes of Roman history: Marcus Furius Camillus. Of patrician descent, Camillus had been elected military tribune three times during the course of the war and was known for his discipline as well as for distinguishing himself on the battle field.

The senate and the people were both increasingly dissatisfied with the military leadership, who seemed more willing to fight amongst themselves than unite behind a winning strategy. Sick of the inconclusive bickering, they turned to Camillus, whose record spoke for itself, and elected him to the first of his unprecedented five dictatorships. Later crises would keep the Romans coming back to him again and again, and it was the reputation he established at Veii that kept them coming back. What looked like a never-ending siege would be brought to completion within his six-month term of office.

Camillus knew as well as anyone that a direct assault on the city was doomed to failure, so he set his mind on devising some other way to gain access. It did not take him long to notice the Veientes extensive sewer systems and how easy it would be to breach the city from underneath. He set his army digging in shifts around the clock, making a tunnel from the Roman camp to one of the drainage pipes that ran under the city. He periodically ordered attacks on the walls to keep the Veientes busy, and they never caught on to the plan. It was now only a matter of time before the legions came pouring in.

Finally, the Romans breached the underground sewer system and followed it to the middle of the city. A raiding party was sent above, emerging from a temple and making straight for the gates. Camillus ordered the bulk of his army in a frontal attack, which must have seemed like madness to the Veientes until the company of Romans appeared in their midst and opened the gates from within. The legions came pouring in and it was the end for Veii.

Camillus and the Romans were not interested in terms of surrender or indemnities. They wanted to destroy the Veientes completely. The men were slaughtered and the women and children sold into slavery. The city was sacked and pillaged, with all its movable wealth finding a new home in the rucksack of some legionary. Prior to final victory, Camillus had made a fateful promise that one tenth the spoils of war would be dedicated to Apollo, but in the commotion of victory, his promise was forgotten and everything was piled into the baggage train undivided. The great Etruscan city of Veii had fallen, never to rise again.

The Exile of Camillus

Upon returning to Rome, the victorious Camillus was awarded a well-earned triumph, though the procession would mark the beginning of his famous undoing which would soon find him exiled from the city he had just lead to victory. Riding at the head of his army, Camillus rode on his chariot drawn by four white horses, traditionally an honor reserved only for kings. The inhabitants of the city whispered to one another that Camillus fancied himself a monarch, and began to look at him not as a conquering hero, but as a potential tyrant. His fate was sealed when, after the soldiers had returned home with their booty, Camillus began to worry about his unfulfilled promise to Apollo. Finally, he issued an order that all the soldiers had to produce one tenth of their treasure and hand it over to the state in order to appease the gods. The citizens were outraged but complied out of their ingrained sense of religious obligation. They were further incensed when Camillus and the senate announced that one tenth of Veii's land would also be set aside for Apollo. The land-starved masses could not believe their ears and it was really only a matter of time before they lashed out at their erstwhile hero.

A year or two passed and a tribune finally brought charges against Camillus for mishandling the wealth taken from Veii. Rather than face a hostile and humiliating trial, Camillus decided to leave the ungrateful Romans to their fate and went into voluntary exile. Legend has it that as he left he offered a prayer that if he was innocent that the gods should cause his former countryman to regret his departure. A pure fabrication, but to the Romans the sight of a massive barbarian invasion did indeed make them soon regret the absence of their best military commander.

Decline of the Etruscans

The victory over Veii marked a turning point for Roman history as well as Italian history as a whole. Veii was one of the richest cities of Etruria and its sack marked the beginning of the end of Etruscan dominance in northern Italy. In the north, Gauls from central Europe began to cross *en masse* into the Po Valley, sweeping through Etruscan defenses and settling in Etruscan lands. The Etruscans thus found themselves squeezed between the Gallic migration and Roman expansion. Military and political solidarity might have helped them beat off the attacks, but the independent minded Etruscans kept to themselves and so saw their cities fall one by one. It was not a quick decline; indeed, we will find them continuing to fight Rome throughout the Samnite Wars, but they would never again have the power or prestige they had so recently enjoyed. In the end, they would all fall under Rome's yolk and find themselves servants where they once had been masters.

Although the push from Gauls helped precipitate Etruscan decline it also prevented the end from coming too quickly. The Romans, flush with victory may very well have continued to push north and defeat all the Etruscan cities one by one. However a force of Gauls moved south through Etruria all the way to the gates of Rome, where they would decisively beat the Romans, handing them a defeat that would leave the city burned to the ground and its citizens debating not which Etruscan city they would attack next but whether or not to abandon their own ruins completely.

Chapter 10

Barbarians at the Gates

The Romans were riding high after their decisive triumph over Veii. The defeat of their longtime Etruscan rival had left the Romans an economic powerhouse. They now controlled the lands north of the Tiber and began resettlement almost immediately. The crops from the rich Etruscan soil promised an end to the cycle of grain famines that had plagued Rome for the previous fifty years. They also became the hub of commerce in central Italy and took sole possession of the all-important salt trade, exponentially increasing Roman wealth. The future was looking good for the Romans but fate was about to deal them a cruel blow. In an instant they would crash from the highest high to the lowest low and find themselves wandering aimlessly amidst the burned out rubble of their city, wondering how the gods could have forsaken them so quickly and so completely. The barbarian sack of Rome would be one of the most traumatizing events in Roman history and leave the Romans in fearful awe of the Gauls until Julius Caesar finally exorcized their psychological demons 350 years later. Rome would survive — just barely — and not without lasting damage.

Brennus and the Senones

To say that “the Gauls” sacked Rome is too broad a description. The label “Gaul” was a catch-all word used by the Romans to describe numerous independent tribes who lived in and around the Alps. There was no sense of union between the Gallic tribes themselves, apart from occasional alliances, and for the most part, they fought as much among themselves as they did against any foreign race. The particular tribe that sacked Rome was called the Senones and they were led by a strong, warrior chieftain named Brennus. They had come over the Alps into the Po valley in the previous century and settled along the Adriatic coast. This brought them into conflict with the Etruscans who had previously controlled the land, and it was this conflict that brought the Senones into conflict with Rome.

There is an official legend that explains Brennus’s decision to leave the Adriatic and move south to attack Rome, as well as a modern interpretation that puts the attack in a wider geopolitical context of Italian *realpolitik*. The official legend is that Brennus attacked the Etruscan city of Clusium who sent envoys to Rome desperately seeking assistance. The Romans were no great friend to Clusium, who had backed the hated King Tarquin in his bid to regain the throne a hundred years earlier, but the Romans knew the Gauls were an enemy to be wary of and so sent envoys to Clusium to take stock of the situation and report back how deeply Rome should involve itself. When they arrived however, the Roman envoys immediately recognized the horde of barbarians as a real threat to all Italy and agreed to help Clusium right then and there. These envoys wound up leading Clusium’s army against the Gauls and in the fighting a Gallic chieftain was killed. Brennus took offence at this. He felt that the diplomatic nature of their mission precluded the envoys taking part in hostilities. He sent his own envoys to Rome to demand retribution but the Romans, in their infinite wisdom, decided that rather than handing the envoys over to Brennus they would elect them military tribunes for that year instead. At this further insult, Brennus ordered his people to march south, where he would teach the ill-mannered Romans a lesson.

Modern historians doubt that a minor incident would lead Brennus to suddenly move his tribe south and attack one of the most heavily fortified cities in Italy. They postulate — and there is some evidence to back it up — that Brennus had come to an agreement with Dionysius of Syracuse to tie the Romans up while Syracuse made its move to dominate Sicily. The Romans had historically been the allies of a Sicilian city called Messana and Dionysius would have been eager

to prevent Rome from sending troops in support of a city he was trying to capture. Thus an arrangement was made between Syracuse and the Gauls to attack Rome and keep them occupied. This seems plausible, but we will never know for sure why Brennus suddenly decided to march on Rome.

We are not only unsure *why* the Gauls attacked, but also *when* the attack actually took place. The confusion, again, is caused by the scarcity of accurate records prior to the event. Traditional Roman history records that the sack took place in 390 BC, but that date is derived from the often incomplete magisterial election rolls that later Romans used to calculate dates of past events. We will encounter this problem again when Livy makes the implausible claim that between 375-370 BC no magistrates of any kind were elected. Livy explains this as being the result of a patrician-plebeian political deadlock, but most likely, he was just trying to reconcile what the electoral rolls said with what his own retrospective chronology was telling him. Modern historians, cross referencing with the more accurate Greek records, place the sack of Rome in 387 or 386 BC. So we are not entirely sure why the Gauls marched on Rome, nor entirely sure when they did so, but we do know *who* marched: the Senones. And we know *where* they marched: from the Adriatic coast to Rome. And we know *how* they got there: they walked. And we know *what* happened when they got there: they sacked Rome. And four out of six is not bad when you're talking about things that happened 2400 years ago.

The Battle of Allia

The Romans were aware of the Gallic advance and enlisted one of the largest armies they had ever assembled to battle a single enemy with plausible estimates ranging from 12,000 to 25,000 men. They gathered at the Allia River — more of a brook than a river — and waited for the barbarians to appear on the horizon. When they did, the Romans were immediately on the fearful defensive. The Gauls were like nothing they had ever seen before. Huge and painted, bearded with long hair, roaring all manner of crazy battle cries, the Gauls were a fearsome sight. When they charged directly, at full speed at the Roman line, it did not take long before the Romans broke. The wings of the Roman army composed of the lightly armed lower class soldiers were easily routed and fled for home, leaving the heavily armed center phalanx to be surrounded and massacred. It was the worst defeat the Romans had suffered to that point in their history, but their nightmare was only just beginning.

In their haste to save themselves, the fleeing soldiers made directly for the fortified citadel on the Capitoline hill, leaving the walls of the city unguarded and the gates wide open. The remaining inhabitants of the city either fled outright or followed the soldiers into the citadel, giving the pursuing Gauls free rein in the city, who, incredulous at the lack of resistance and believing it to be some sort of trap, waited a full day before they were satisfied that it was no trick and entered.

The Siege of the Capitoline

An initial attempt to take the Capitoline failed, so Brennus, rather than waste his manpower in pointless fighting decided to settle in and starve the Romans out, meanwhile stripping the city of all its moveable wealth. The siege of the Capitoline began to be measured not in days or weeks, but in months — without any sign of the deadlock breaking. The besieged Romans grew more and more desperate as their supplies and morale ran out. The Gauls were fairing no better. The hot Italian summer was not what the northern tribesmen were used to and they began to drop like flies. Disease ran rampant and Brennus saw his force dwindle daily in the foreign climate. It was a race to the bottom as both sides hoped to hold out one day longer than their equally beleaguered foe.

At one point the Romans were nearly defeated but were saved at the last minute in dramatic fashion. A messenger had been sent from the Capitoline to make contact with Camillus, their exiled hero, to plead with him to bring a force to lift the siege and save his former countrymen. The messenger scaled down an unguarded cliff but the Gauls noticed the route and attempted to scale the same cliff themselves and break into the citadel. But famously, as the Gauls climbed, the sacred Capitoline geese, who the Romans had brought with them into the citadel, were roused and began to make a racket. The Romans, led by a patrician soldier named Manlius were tipped off to the danger and drove the barbarians off the wall, preventing the only real attempt to take the Romans by force. For his quick action and bravery, Manlius was lauded as a hero. But in a few years he would be executed for treason not far from the site of these heroics — a tragic victim of his own vanity.

Woe to the Conquered?

The siege stretched to seven months and both sides were at the breaking point. In their respective desperate straits, they both agreed to something neither would have considered at the start: the Romans would pay the Gauls to leave the city. Both considered this a dishonorable end to the fight, but the Romans had to get off the Capitoline hill or they would all die and Brennus, who wanted nothing more than to get out of the hot, diseased city, was now able to do so and still claim victory. The Romans agreed to pay the Gauls one thousand pounds of gold and scales were brought in to measure the amount. As the gold was being weighed, however, the Romans noticed that the scales had been tampered with and the pounds were much heavier than they should have been. They complained, and in response Brennus threw his sword onto the scales, further increasing the imbalance and stating famously: "Woe to the conquered." The Romans stifled their objections and measured out the remaining gold, fuming but unable to do anything.

The story of the sack of Rome probably ended here, with the Gauls withdrawing north after being paid off. However, later Romans spread a thick coat of triumphant propaganda over the end of the story to save themselves the embarrassment of admitting to such a dishonorable conclusion, just as they added the story of Mucius Scaevola to the end of the war with Clusium to avoid admitting that they had been beaten by Lars Porsena. In the Roman Hollywood ending, Camillus is reached and raises a force from the neighboring Latin tribes and marches on the city. He arrives just after the Gauls have been paid, and finding them sleeping off their triumph attacks and beats the formerly invincible barbarian army, driving them out of Latium for good and recovering the Roman gold. Camillus then basks in the glow of Roman adulation as the screen fades to black and the credits roll. A nice story but complete fiction.

Rome Nearly Abandoned

Regardless of whether Roman honor was saved at the last moment by miraculous intervention or not, the fact remained that the city was in ruins. At some point during the siege, a fire had started and the city was gutted by an uncontrolled blaze. The surviving Romans, penniless and faced with the prospect of completely rebuilding their city, despaired that it was even possible and began to speak of abandoning the seven hills altogether and moving *en masse* to Veii where they could start afresh. Camillus strongly opposed this idea and gave an impassioned speech for the people to rebuild Rome and not flee in the face of adversity. To leave would be an admission of weakness and a moral failing. To stay would prove that Rome could never be defeated. The people, facing a choice between practical logistics and theoretical duty remained unconvinced, but as the senate was proceeding with the debate, a company of soldiers returning from guard duty stopped in the forum and their commander ordered a halt, saying "Well, we may as well stop here." The senators overheard this and, never ones to ignore a clear omen, immediately closed the debate, rejecting all further proposals to abandon the city. Rebuilding would begin at once, no matter the cost or difficulty. Rome was there to stay.

Impact of the Sack

The history of Rome is bookended by barbarian sacks. It would be 850 years before another foreign invader stepped foot in the city. By then, Rome had risen, crested, declined and was in the process of failing. Brennus's sack of Rome, on the other end, ushered in Rome's era of dominance. Until the sack, Rome was merely one among many in Italian polities — fighting and winning, but also dealing with setbacks and defeats. After the destruction of Rome, the Romans were reborn along with the physical city they lived in. It would be a more determined, more consciously imperial citizen body that would emerge in the 300s BC.

The Romans would never again find themselves under the yoke of a foreign power, nor their walls breached by an invading force. When in the AD 400s, the Visigoths and the Vandals finally sacked the city, the level of despair was grossly inflated because the inviolability of the city had been taken for granted. Other cities changed hands, were occupied or expelled their occupiers — this was the natural ebb and flow of ancient politics. Rome however, came to be eternally free, granted special status by the gods. For all the physical damage it did, the Vandal sack destroyed Rome psychologically—a blow from which it never recovered. This sense of invincibility was born in the aftermath of the last barbarian sack, 850 years earlier. The Gallic victory humiliated, offended, and horrified the Romans who endured it and they vowed to never let it happen again. They successfully kept their word for almost a thousand years — a remarkable feat in the perilous and violent world of antiquity, a tribute to Roman obstinacy, steadfast endurance, and unflinching resolve. A commitment to existence was born out of near total destruction.

From a practical standpoint, the sack also brings to an end the period of early Roman history about which we have no clear records or primary sources. Though all previous records were lost in the fire, the Romans simply started again, leaving us a wealth of documentation that puts our understanding of their history on much firmer footing from this point on. The legend of Rome has finally ended and the history of Rome has begun.

Chapter 11

The Morning After

Rome was devastated. The city was in ruins and the population, what remained of it, despaired. Officially, the subject of abandoning Rome has been closed, but unofficially, the idea was still a potent force. Why rebuild when perfectly good homes sat vacant in a well-positioned, defensible city? The Romans had been merciless in their annihilation of the Veiiites and the Etruscan city was practically a ghost city. However, the Senate's mind was made up and the Romans were ordered to rebuild, each according to their means. Camillus, whom the people now looked upon as twice their savior (if we believe the legends), stood firm behind staying in Rome and the population, some reluctantly, followed their hero's lead.

The new Rome that would grow out of the ashes of the Gallic sack would be recognizable today, with its haphazard streets and deep tangled neighborhoods, clearly devoid of any central planning. There was in fact no planning whatsoever. The Romans simply picked up what material they could salvage and began rebuilding wherever the whims of each individual directed. Rome (and I say this with love) is, and has been since the 380s BC, a convoluted mess that defies logic. The irony being that in almost all other towns, cities, and camps built by the Romans, rational right angles was the norm. A model was developed for the fortified military camp that centered around bisecting, perpendicular roads that was copied in almost every other settlement the Romans established. A centurion encamped in Britain would have been able to easily navigate his way around a camp in Syria. Everywhere the Romans went they took their standard grid city layout with them. The Eternal City itself was the dark secret of Roman Type-A OCD. The roots of the chaos lay in those years after the Gallic sack when the Romans rebuilt quickly, but without any kind of master plan.

Not that this is necessarily the Romans' fault. As they were attempting to rebuild their shattered city, nearly every formerly subdued enemy attempted to break free from Roman hegemony. As I mentioned at the end of last week, the usual suspects, particularly the Volscians reappeared, but longtime allies now rose up as well. Rebelling against Rome became the fashion among long disgruntled Latin communities who had never got over Rome's breaking of the Latin League a hundred years earlier at the battle of Lake Regillus.

Even colonies set up by Rome, with strong ties to the city joined in

the rebellions to attack their mother city while it was down. While trying to put their lives back together the Romans kept being recalled to arms, now to fight on this front, now to fight that enemy, now to fight this former friend. It is no wonder the city grew so haphazardly: there was barely enough time to nail the roof down before it was time to fight again.

Throughout these years Camillus was the rock behind which the insecure Romans hid. In times of danger they turned to him time and again to lead them to victory. Whether he was appointed official dictator, as he was in 389, 368, and, for the fifth and final time, 367 BC, or whether he was elected as one of the military tribunes for that year, Camillus was unquestionably, the leader of Rome. Everyone relied upon his strategic and tactical brilliance to see them through these dark times. His enemies, and he did have a few, accused him of arrogance, of treating his fellow tribunes as if they were his vassals, not his equals, but the people were indifferent to these accusations. Camillus was their man. Furthermore, the other commanders did little to inspire the people's confidence. At one point a tribune leading a legion against an allied army of Latins and Volscians saw his army flee in terror and hide behind their camp walls. Camillus was ordered to take command, and, by his very presence instilled the soldiers with enough confidence to march back out and defeat the enemy they thought so powerful. Camillus dominated his time and it would be another 150 years until anyone emerged to equal him in the pantheon of Roman heroes. That man, Scipio Africanus, delivered the Romans from the scourge of Hannibal, and is often mentioned in the same breath as Camillus. Indeed, the consensus opinion is that later historians, Plutarch and Livy especially, colored their descriptions of Camillus to make him seem a prelude to the Great Scipio of Africa.

Manlius as Demagogue

While Camillus remained in the people's high esteem, another hero fell from grace. Marcus Manlius Capitolinus, the last name attached in honor of his bravery during the Gallic siege, would soon find himself etched into Roman history not as a great hero, but as a great villain. After the withdrawal of the Gauls, Manlius's ego was severely bruised by the honors heaped upon Camillus and took it as a personal insult. Had he and the others not held out against the Gauls, Camillus never would have had the opportunity to 'save' them. Surely that deserved some glory, but Camillus hogged it all. Manlius was one of the few amongst the citizen body who could not stand the sight of Camillus, whom he considered a pompous fraud. This aggravation led Manlius to break ranks with his fellow patricians and take up the cause of the plebeians. By making himself their champion, Manlius hoped to side-step Camillus and earn the acclaim he felt he deserved.

The most pressing issue of the day was debt relief. Obviously as the Romans rebuilt there was a hefty amount of borrowing going on, and the interest payments began to bankrupt the population. Everyday saw men hauled off to prison for defaulting on loans. Men who had fought at Veii and stood firm against the Gauls were daily being made slaves by money lenders, who showed no mercy or compassion. Manlius spoke out publicly in favor of relief and often paid the debts of former soldiers out of his own pocket and offered interest free loans to any who asked. The patricians were disturbed by Manlius's new image as the savior of the people, not only because they saw him as letting irresponsible debtors off the hook, but also because he was constantly slipping in references to the great untapped strength of the populace and how their numerical superiority ought to count for something in the formation of policy. The patricians saw these as veiled, and not so veiled threats against the established order and began to see Manlius as a revolutionary figure. Manlius was arrested once, on charges of bringing false claims of theft against the money lenders, but public outcry was so great he was released.

A period of peace created the opportunity for real public unrest, riots began to break out between patrician and plebeian factions, Manlius offering daily harangues against the tyranny of the nobles and offering himself as the only patrician who cared at all about his fellow citizens. His implication was clear: Throw out the senate and elect a new democratic government with me as your leader. Finally, unable to take it anymore, the patricians again arrested Manlius, this time on charges of sedition and treason. The trial of Manlius would become famous for the way it would play out. The trial was originally held on

the Campus Martius, which lay in the shadow of the Capitoline Hill. During his defense, Manlius was able to stretch his hand up to the hill and remind people of his great service to the city, asking how anyone could possibly believe he was now engaged in treason. The argument was effective, so the savvy patricians adjourned the trial to a different location. Now without the Capitoline as a backdrop, the charges and evidence against Manlius stood on their own merits. Public opinion turned against Manlius, who, it became obvious, was engaged in an active conspiracy to overthrow the senate. The verdict was swift and harsh. He was thrown from the Tarpeian Rock, a steep cliff on the Capitoline used for executions, ironically dying in disgrace a few feet from where he had achieved his greatest glory.

The First Plebeian Consul

The death of Manlius did nothing to end plebeian unrest, however. Manlius saw an opportunity and exploited it, he did not create the conditions for that opportunity. The plebeians' overriding concerns at this point were, as we have seen, debt relief, but the old standbys of land redistribution and access to political power rose again. The former problem was wrapped up in the latter two and the plebeians began to focus their energy on the land and questions of power. Both the land taken from Veii in the north and taken from the Volscians in the south conspicuously wound up in the hands of a few patrician landowners rather than being divided up amongst the masses. How were the people supposed to pay off their debts when they were denied the income land provided? Furthermore, how was it that state policy had granted so much to so few? Obviously, whatever concessions had been made to the plebeians in the past had lost potency. The plebeians finally saw the office of Military Tribune with Consular Power for what it was, an attempt to water down plebeian authority and deny them access to the consulship, the ultimate office of state. One man in particular, a patrician with two daughters took it upon himself to end once and for all this unbalance.

Marcus Fabius Ambustus, a patrician who enjoyed plebeian support had married his eldest daughter to an influential patrician and his youngest to a wealthy plebeian named Gaius Licinius Polo. The younger daughter complained that she would never receive the honors her elder sister received on account of her husband's plebeian status. Fabius, the story goes, promised his daughter she would have everything her sister had and began working with his son-in-law Licinius to break the patrician stranglehold on the consulship. They began by pointing out to the people that despite plebeian access to the office of military tribune, no plebeian had been elected to the office in the last decade, which was true. They then demanded a permanent return to the dual consulship, with the stipulation that one of the consuls had to be a plebeian. Licinius got himself elected as a tribune of the plebeians, an office that had fallen into some disrepute, and used his veto power to bring government business to a standstill. He promised to veto everything in sight, including the yearly elections until his demands were met. In addition to access to the consulship, Licinius also demanded that a cap be put on the total amount of land a man could own as well as regulations on interest rates. It was this shutdown, engineered by Fabius and Licinius that Livy uses to explain his chronological gap, stating that between 375 and 370 BC no magisterial elections were held. Though the duration and excess of the standoff is no doubt exaggerated, the outcome is not. The plebeians

finally gained access to the consulship.

The moment would not come without a final appearance of the great Camillus, however. The civil unrest and power vacuum led to calls for a dictator, and the senate named Camillus who enjoyed the support of patrician and plebeian alike. They were hoping Camillus would see things their way, but much to their discomfort he did not. Due to a flaw in the appointment ceremony (a religious event full of Roman superstition), Camillus was forced to resign, granting a reprieve of sorts to the clearly defensive patricians. The next year though, 367 BC, Camillus was named dictator once again, for the fifth and final time. He used his power to broker the deal Licinius and his colleagues demanded, and for the first time a plebeian was elected consul. The crises settled, Camillus resigned. The old Roman leader died soon after, a victim of a plague that devastated the Romans in the 360s BC. With his death a new era dawned. The Romans had survived their brush with death and emerged a strong and, for the moment, more democratic society.

The honor of first plebeian consul historically goes to Lucius Sextius, one of Licinius's colleagues who had helped engineer the shutdown. The land ownership ceiling and regulation of debt were granted at the same time and, ironically, Licinius himself would be prosecuted years later for violating his own laws after he sought to accumulate large tracts of land for himself and his family. At this point, the law stated merely that one of the consuls could be a plebeian. Later, around 340 BC, a law was passed stating that one of the consuls had to be a plebeian. For now though, the plebeians accepted the victory and passed to the next generation the task of not simply allowing equal access to power, but guaranteeing it.

The veracity of the patrician-plebeian showdown and the clear election of a "First Plebeian Consul" in 366 BC has been called into question by modern historians. In the first place, they point out that Roman historians of the late Republic and early imperial period are obviously drawing their narrative from more recent events, specifically the conflicts that centered around the Gracchi brothers, who used their veto power to try and force through land redistribution in the 130s and 120s BC. Modern analysis has also determined that as many as a third of the consuls prior to 366 BC were of plebeian origin. As is so often the case, a clear dramatic delineation in history is less plausible than a gradual shift in policy over the years. There is no doubt that the vast majority of early consuls were patricians, but is suspected that this was not the result of overt discrimination, but rather because of the greater wealth and fame of patrician candidates.

The 366 BC date is important though because from that point on there is a marked increase in plebeian consuls, demonstrating some sort of conscious decision to grant plebeians more power. Of course, the existence of a 342 BC law stipulating that one consul had to be plebeian is not disputed and it seems likely that this was the culmination of a decades long shift rather than a bolt out of the blue. In general, what can be stated is that after the sack of Rome, the plebeians demanded and received far greater power than they had prior to the arrival of the Gauls.

The Romans struggled in the years after the Gauls left them for dead, but managed to hold on in the face of massive external pressure. The new enfranchisement of the plebeians made the Romans a more cohesive and less divided society. This cohesion would be tested by a confrontation that loomed on the horizon. Though the Romans did not know it yet, they were about to begin a series of wars that would leave them the dominant force not just of Latium or central Italy but all Italy. Next week we introduce the Samnites, the fiercest of the hill tribes, who would not only prove more than a match for Rome, but also force the Romans to rethink everything they knew about warfare. The Romans would fight a single great war, with three distinct phases against the Samnites between 343 and 295 BC. The Samnite wars would pull all the major powers of Italy onto one side or the other and culminate with the largest battle ever fought on Italian soil. When it was over, the Roman victory was so complete, it would be 200 years before an Italian people again mounted a serious threat to Roman rule and, by that time, Rome had grown into an empire the Italians were not trying to topple, but rather gain full legal citizenship within.

Chapter 12

The First Samnite War

343 – 341 BC

In a single generation Rome had recovered from the devastation of the Gallic sack and regained its dominant position within the region. The plebeians had demanded and received greater political power, culminating with the election of the first plebeian consul in 366 BC, the year after Camillus shepherded the Licinian Law through the senate. The admittance of plebeians to the consulship also saw the end of military tribunes with consular power as the highest office of state. The dual consulship was reinstated for good and the obsolete office of military tribune was not revived. Subsequent years would see other plebeian firsts including the first plebeian dictator in 356 BC and the first plebeian censor in 351 BC, both feats achieved by a single man, Gaius Marcius Rutulus, who over the course of his illustrious career would also be elected consul four times.

By 343 BC, the Romans were once again seen as the great force in central Italy and, as we are about to see, this meant that their neighbors forever sought to involve them in squabbles that didn't have anything to do with Rome or Roman interests. The Romans were the big kid on the block every other kid wanted on his side.

As Livy commented when discussing the year hostilities with the Samnites began:

“Rome was on the precipice of its rise to greatness.”

The Samnites

The Samnites were a semi-nomadic tribe from a south central section of the Apennines called Samnium. Starting in the 300s BC the Samnites, along with a number of other hill tribes began to come down out of the hills and onto the plains that lay

between the mountains and the coastline. Some moved south and began to encroach on the Greek cities of Magna Graecia. Others, like the Samnites began to move west and came down into a land known as Campania, which lay south-east of Rome. The Greeks in the south sent envoys across the Adriatic to beg for assistance in fighting off the hill tribes and were answered by Alexander of Epirus, who sent an army to help rid the Greeks of the encroaching menace. As we will see later, this introduction of an army from Epirus would have far reaching consequences for the Romans. Sixty years later an army from Epirus would again answer Greek calls for aid, only this time it was not to battle nomadic hill tribes, but rather the growing power of Rome.

The largest and most important city in Campania, where the Samnites were establishing themselves, was Capua. Known for its rich soil and soft lifestyle, Capua was no match for the hardened Samnite warriors, so, like the Greeks, they cast about for a savior. Envoys were sent to the largest and strongest power in the region, Rome, to beg for aid. The Romans, however, turned the envoys away. Rome had already concluded a treaty with the Samnites and could not in good conscience break it. They had, after all, sworn oaths before the gods. The desperate Capuans then took an extraordinary step: they formally surrendered Capua, its land and citizens to Rome, willingly making themselves subjects of Rome. The senate could not look this massive gift horse in the mouth, the land controlled by Capua was some of the best in Italy and the food it could provide would put the days of grain famines behind them forever. The Romans accepted the surrender and sent their own envoys to Samnium where they explained that Capua was now Roman territory and, as per their treaty, the Samnites must desist all attacks. The Samnites would have none of this and scoffed at the Roman envoys, taking the insulting step of ordering a raid into Campania right in front of the Roman legates. The Romans, offended by this obvious breach of protocol, felt they had no choice at this point but to declare war. And so the first Samnite war began.

Marcus Valerius Corvus

The two consuls for the year, 343 BC by our reckoning, were Aulus Cornelius Cossus a capable if forgettable leader and Marcus Valerius Corvus, a true blue member of the Famous Roman Heroes Club. He was a member of the prominent Valerian family, whose famous ancestral patriarch was Publius Valerius Publicola, the People's Friend. The surname Corvus, or "raven", was earned as a young man while serving in the army. The legions were squaring off against an army of Gauls, when a huge Gallic fighter stepped forward and challenged any Roman to single combat. Young Marcus Valerius, all of 22 years old, stepped forward and accepted the challenge. As he approached the Gaul, a raven landed on his shoulder, a sign that the gods favored him. The Gaul was worried by this clear omen, but proceeded with the fight anyway. The raven, far from leaving when the clash began, actually joined in, pecking at the Gaul's eyes while Valerius ran him through with his sword. Valerius triumphant, the raven flew off. The legions then swept into the Gallic line and defeated them almost without resistance. This was an auspicious, if obviously embellished, beginning to a career. Corvus would be elected consul for the first time the very next year at the unprecedented age of 23. Before dying at the also unprecedented age of 100, he would be elected consul five more times and named dictator twice. Truly a heavy hitter in the Roman lineup of stars.

But getting back to the war with the Samnites, Corvus was sent to protect Campania and his colleague Cossus was sent to invade Samnium. Between the two, they figured to have the Samnites at heel in no time. Corvus was the first to meet the enemy. After a fierce battle at the base of Mt. Gaurus, despite being fiercer than the Romans expected, the Samnites were routed. It was not an easy victory and put the Romans on notice that they were not fighting Volscian raiders anymore.

Decius Saves the Day

Cossus, in Samnium, almost blundered his way into destroying his army, but was saved by one of his military tribunes (without consular power). The consul had led his army into a ravine and noticed only too late that the Samnites had taken up a position on the ridge and stood ready to shower them with projectiles. One of his tribunes, Publius Decius, noticed that the Samnites were positioned in the shadow of a steep hill and if a company of Romans could take the hill then they could pin down the Samnites, allowing the legions to escape. Cossus immediately ordered Decius and a detachment of volunteers to execute the plan. Decius slipped up and took the hill before the Samnites realized what was going on and immediately began pelting the Samnites with missiles. In the confusion, Cossus was able to withdraw his army to safety, but Decius was left on the hill surrounded by an army of angry Samnites who had just been denied an easy victory.

Secure on the high ground, the Roman detachment was able to hold out until nightfall, at which point, recognizing their hopeless position they decided to risk death by sneaking through the Samnite army rather than remain on the hill and safely starve to death. They had gone about halfway through the camp when one of the soldiers dropped his shield on a sleeping Samnite. Decius immediately began yelling at his men to attack anything that moved. The Samnites, half-asleep and panicked by the sudden violent commotion did not know what or who to attack. Decius and his men made a break through the army, killing everything in their path. When they emerged on the other side Decius took a head count and realized to his great pleasure that of the company of men he had led on a suicide mission, he had not lost a single man. In the morning they made their way to Roman camp and were greeted to thunderous applause. Cossus was about to launch into a speech praising Decius when the tribune cut him off, saying that the Samnites were in complete disarray and the time to finish the job was right now. Cossus took the advice and sent his army out. The Romans found the Samnites exactly as Decius had described, in confused disarray, attacked immediately and won easily.

The Romans had now won their first two engagements with the Samnites, but the first had been an unexpectedly hard slog and the latter would have been a disaster had it not been for the tactical blunder the Samnites committed by not immediately falling on Cossus's legions. The third and final battle of the war was fought at Suessula, near the border between Campania and Samnium. Envoys from that city came to Marcus Corvus with news that the army he had

driven off was regrouping and planning to re-invade. Corvus ordered his army forward with all haste, leaving behind all non-essential personnel and gear, marching only with his infantry, cavalry and what could be carried on their backs. This decision to pack light would prove, unexpectedly, to be the decisive factor in the coming fight.

Battle of Suessula — 343 BC

When Corvus arrived in Suessula, he ordered a camp built. Because of the paucity of men and material, the camp turned out to be physically much smaller than the Samnites were used to seeing the Romans build. They assumed this meant that a smaller force was encamped and all their strategic decisions flowed from this faulty assumption. They decided that the best course would be to starve the small Roman garrison out and began preparing for a siege. The Samnite commanders ordered foraging parties out across the countryside for supplies to sustain their army while they waited for the Romans to surrender. Corvus caught wind of the Samnite activities and, as soon as the bulk of the army was scattered he ordered his men to attack. The Samnites were shocked when complete legions came pouring out of the small camp, not the minor detachment they had supposed they were dealing with. Corvus's army took the Samnite camp almost without a fight and then spent the rest of the afternoon rounding up the dispersed Samnite foraging parties. The Battle of Suessula was over before it had really begun.

This victory marked the end of the first Samnite war. Corvus and Cossus were both awarded triumphs and Decius was given the grass crown for his heroics. The grass crown was the most prestigious and rarely given military honor, the highest decoration a Roman soldier could receive. It was given to an individual who single-handedly (or nearly single-handedly) saved an entire legion from destruction. It was a rare honor because it was granted only by a vote of the saved legionaries themselves and it took extraordinary circumstances for proud Roman soldiers to admit that they had to be rescued. But in this case it was universally understood that Decius had saved their butts. So Decius got the crown.

Mutiny in the Legions

After the fighting ended however, the Romans were forced to deal with trouble from an unexpected direction: their own legions. During the winter of 342-341 BC, the legions were garrisoned across Campania, to watch for further Samnite aggression. The largest garrison was outside Capua, and the city famous for its soft, easy living, had a detrimental effect on military discipline. Indeed, as we will later see, some note a marked change in the power and endurance of Hannibal's army after spending the winter in Capua during the Second Punic War. The Roman garrison, cooped up for the winter in camp looked on at the comfortable Capuans and began asking themselves why a people who could not even defend themselves were allowed to have so much when they, the soldiers who secured the peace, were given so little. The consuls for that year began to hear mutinous rumors coming from the Campanian legions and took steps to nip the conspiracy in the bud, but the move backfired. Their plan was to quietly reassign the men identified as conspirators and shuffle groups of soldiers around so no hard plans could be laid. However, the conspirators quickly caught on and, rather than reporting to their new assignments they collected at an arranged point and began to actively plot a rebellion. They soon had enough soldiers but lacked a leader to make them a cohesive unit. In a classic display of unproductive male ego and pride, nobody was willing to submit to the command of anyone else and so they remained a body without a head.

As they brainstormed for ways out of their dilemma, it was noted that an ex-general, Titus Quinctius, lived in the area. Quinctius had retired fully from public life, despising the backstabbing intrigue of Roman politics and the conspirators decided he was a perfect choice to lead them. A company of men was sent to persuade the old man to join their cause. Quinctius, however, wanted nothing to do with the mutinous rabble, but was "persuaded" when the men threatened to kill him and his whole family. Having successfully hijacked a leader the revolt moved forward, and the men marched toward Rome, though what exactly they hoped to accomplish is unclear. They probably wanted to secure land grants in Campania, but how they thought the senate or people of Rome would simply give them what they wanted and then go on as if nothing happened is a mystery. The rebellion had taken on an irrational momentum all its own.

Upon hearing the news that a rebellious army was marching on Rome, the senate immediately named Marcus Corvus to the first of his two dictatorships and he rode off at the head of a legion to stop the mutinous army. They met each other at the Alban Mount (near the

birthplace of Romulus and Remus), but neither side was destined to draw their swords in anger. Instead, the occasion was defined by reconciliation and secured Corvus's place in the history books not just as a great warrior but also a wise and compassionate leader of men. He was loved not just by the men he led that day, but also by the mutineers, most of whom had fought for him against the Samnites.

Corvus implored them to put down their swords and not draw the blood of their fellow citizens. Quinctius, the hijacked general, who wanted no part of the rebellion anyway, ordered his men to stand down and the combined weight of these two towering figures compelled them to give up. Corvus then led a combined force back into Rome where he famously asked for and received clemency for the rebellious soldiers. Corvus did not want the affair to remain a thorn in the side of Roman solidarity, and he made sure no soldier was cast off the census rolls or in any other way penalized for his actions. It was a singular case of leniency toward mutinous soldiers and, though Corvus was hailed forever after as a great man for securing this leniency, his example was rarely followed by later generations who treated any hint of mutiny quickly and without mercy.

After the Peace

Soon after the abortive rebellion was quashed, a truce was formalized with the Samnites. The Campanians, however, were in no mood for peace and allied themselves with a combined Latin army that took the fight into Samnium as a punitive response to the Samnite invasion of Campania. The Latin communities hoped to grab some Samnite land and enhance their own power in the region, hopefully securing better terms in their alliance with Rome. The Samnites immediately appealed to Romans to halt the attacks. The Romans agreed to order the Campanians, who were now their subjects to halt, but claimed their treaty with the Latins granted them no authority over their internal military decisions. This decision had two effects. For one, it offended the Samnites, who thought the Romans were just hiding behind legalese and directing the Latins, subjects to Rome in all but name to keep fighting illegally after the treaty had been established. Secondly, it perked the ears of the Latins, who took the Roman decision to mean that the Romans did not believe they could stop the Latins from doing what they wished. The time was ripe, the Latins decided, to renegotiate their status with Rome. For over a hundred years they had sent men and money to fight Roman wars, and were consistently given only a pittance of the spoils in return. Full equality, they decided, was theirs for the taking and turning away from the Samnites, they set their sights on Rome itself. Having just concluded one war, the Romans were about to be embroiled in another, the Latin War, which would not turn out exactly as the Latins planned, resulting not in full equality but full subservience to Roman rule and an end to even the appearance of independence.

The first Samnite war would prove to be mere foreplay between the Samnites and Romans. The Romans had gotten the upper hand, but it could have just as easily gone the other way. The Second or Great Samnite War would start 20 years later and last not for two years but 22 years. In that war, the Samnites would hand the Romans some of their greatest and most humiliating defeats. Since the founding of Rome the Romans had used the Greek phalanx system and soon found it to be unsuited for the mountainous terrain of Samnium. The Samnite cavalry and light infantry were able to easily outmaneuver the heavy Roman phalanx, forcing the Romans to completely overhaul their military structure before they could beat the Samnites in the field. However, these struggles were still a generation away, and in the meantime the Romans would follow the old adage that the enemy of my enemy is my friend and joined forces with the Samnites to quash forever Latin dreams of independence.

Chapter 13

The Latin War

340-338 BC

The outcome of First Samnite War had been inconclusive. The Romans had gotten the better of it in battle, but nothing resembling a definitive conclusion was reached. The Samnites seemed content to consolidate their gains and not to press the issue and the Romans were disinclined to take the fight to the next level. They had done right by their allies and driven the Samnites out of Campania. They had no interest (at present) in invading Samnium and trying to conquer a strong-willed, capable and well supplied army. Furthermore, the winds of discontent were blowing in from Latium, and the Romans knew full well that if they got entangled with the Samnites, the Latin communities would be in strong position to leverage concessions from the Romans. So a peace treaty was concluded between the Romans and Samnites. The Latins saw this as a tacit admission of weakness and, seeking a more beneficial arrangement with the Romans, decided to strike while the iron was hot.

However, before any sort of conflict with the Latins was joined, a further step was taken in the plebeian quest for a greater share in power. In 342 BC, not long after the mutiny of the garrisoned soldiers in Campania, the plebeians pushed through another set of reforms that solidified their power. The package included the important provision that one of the consuls for each year not just could be a plebeian but had to be a plebeian, but more importantly, it set the well-known and oft-cited requirement that ten years must pass before a man could hold the same office twice. The move was designed to prevent one man from gaining too much power, though at times the cure was worse than the disease, especially, for example, during the Second Punic War when it became nearly impossible to run the war when the leadership kept changing. Though the ten year requirement was followed and disregarded according to circumstance it did set a cultural precedent strong enough that when, between 104 and 100 BC Gaius Marius was elected consul five times in a row, it was a scandal that engendered so much ill-will that the social fabric of the state began to unravel.

Impertinent Latins

When the Romans withdrew from fighting the Samnites, the Campanians and Latins all wanted to continue the fight. As I mentioned last week the Samnites implored the Romans to put a stop to the aggression but the Romans refused to order the Latins to do anything one way or the other. The Latins immediately took this to mean that if Rome did not feel strong enough to enforce its will, the Latins must be stronger than their supposed masters. They resolved to use this to their advantage.

A delegation representing the Latin League was sent to Rome to demand a political re-ordering. Up to this point the Latins had enjoyed varying degrees of Roman citizenship, usually trade and intermarriage rights, stopping short of full suffrage. The delegation asked for full suffrage and also audaciously demanded that one of the two yearly consuls come from the Latin communities. The Romans were shocked and practically laughed the delegation out of the senate. No Roman was going to submit himself to the rule of a mere Latin. The plebeians had just guaranteed their own consulship and weren't about to give it up while the patricians had just given up one of their consulships and weren't about to let go of the other. On the question of a Latin consul, the two classes were united. The senate's paraphrased answer to the Latin delegation was: "No, no, there will be no political re-ordering, we like things just the way they are, thank you very much. Do you not recall that we wiped the floor with you at Lake Regillus? That's why things are the way they are. If you really want what you're asking for then come take it if you can."

The Senate voted for war to teach the impertinent Latins a lesson. Legions were raised and sent out to meet the Latin force that had been massing in anticipation of the senate's rejection of the Latin demands. The consuls for the year were Titus Manlius Torquatus and our old friend and hero of the first Samnite War Publius Decius — he of the grass crown.

The Consulship of Decius and Manlius

Romans dated the past by reference to the consuls for a given year rather than by an arbitrary numbering system, so that, for example, last week's battles with the Samnites were said to have taken place in the consulship of Corvus and Cossus rather than in 167 (dating from the founding of the republic) or 409 (dating from the founding of the city). It seems a bit unwieldy to us, but the Romans liked it just fine. Later, this system of reference would lead to the Roman joke that events occurring in the year of Julius Caesar's consulship (59 BC), took place not in the consulship of Caesar and Bibulus, but in the consulship of Julius and Caesar. The Romans could be a laugh a minute when the mood struck.

The war with the Latins began in the consulship of Decius and Manlius (340 BC). In the beginning, the outcome was very much in doubt. It had been years since the Romans had fought an enemy that so evenly matched them. It was almost like facing a mirror. The Roman and Latin forces were nearly identical in size, they used all the same tactics, spoke the same language, prayed to the same gods and in most cases knew each other personally. There would not be any surprises or innovative tactics, just a standard straight ahead infantry battle and victory to the strongest, or luckiest. Both sides knew it and knew heavy casualties loomed as force pitted itself against force.

Two legends emerged from the war, one revealing how the Romans were able to win a fight that seemed destined to produce a draw, the second hammering home the idea that obeying consular authority is paramount and the only way to maintain the discipline necessary for Rome to defeat her enemies.

The first legend states that after the legions had built their camp near the Latin force and settled in for the night, both consuls had the same dream. In it, an apparition revealed that in the coming battle the victorious side would sacrifice a commander, while the losing side would sacrifice its whole army. When they awoke the two conferred and realized they had the same dream. They made a pact that each would lead one flank of the army, and whichever side began to fail first, that consul would charge into the enemy and seek death so the gods would grant the whole army victory.

The second legend states the consul Manlius had given orders to his troops that no one should engage the Latins until he had given the order. He wanted the battle to start at the time and place of his choosing and didn't want reckless brawling to spark a battle he wasn't prepared for. Manlius's son Titus, however, disobeyed the order while

leading a cavalry detachment on patrol. They encountered a group of Latins and Titus was challenged to single combat by one of them. Titus demurred, understanding his orders, but the Latins called him a coward and other nasty names. His hackles raised, Titus accepted and proceeded to kill his challenger. Returning to camp with the spoils taken from his dead enemy, Titus was greeted by cheers, but the festive atmosphere died under the withering stare of his father, who ordered his son arrested. Manlius gave a brief speech in which he defended what he was about to do. His family, he said, would be torn apart by the punishment he was about to hand down, but that was far better than having the entire state torn apart by disobedience to consular authority. Then, without compassion and to the horror of his men, Manlius ordered his own son flogged and beheaded. Titus was given a hero's burial and the army, from that point on, hated their commander, but it was, to Manlius's credit, a far more disciplined and professional army that was doing the hating than before.

There is nothing new about either of the legends and they are both repeats of previous stories. Those of you who know Greek history will recognize in the former elements of King Leonidas's vision that Sparta must either lose a king or its freedom to the Persians, which lead him to make a suicidal last stand at Thermopylae to save his city. You may also notice that Manlius's decision to execute his own son follows closely the story of the consul Brutus and his treasonous sons from the early days of the republic. Roman annalists were enamored with the idea that Romans of the past displayed a dedication to the state that had fallen out of fashion and needed to be rekindled. To the later Romans, just as it is today and in most other times and places, the past became bathed in the golden light of simple nobility and selfless virtue, whether or not any such virtue existed.

Near the base of Mt. Vesuvius (yes *that* Mt. Vesuvius) the Latins and Romans lined up for battle and the fight was joined, with Decius leading the left flank and Manlius the right. The fighting was intense and evenly matched, but soon the Roman left began to buckle under the weight of the Latin advance. Decius, knowing what he must do, donned a ceremonial purple-tinged toga and veiled his face. Then, fully armed he mounted his horse and charged at the opposing line. The Latins were at first terrified at the appearance of this mad, masked horseman and Decius killed not an insignificant number before he was finally taken down by a shower of spears. Manlius, watching his colleague fall, knew that victory was within his grasp. He held back a reserve of veteran soldiers and, when the Latins were worn down, Manlius sent in the fresh troops and the Latins broke. Returning to Rome, it is said that Manlius was greeted with acclaim

by the older men, but shunned by the young, who hated him for executing Titus, a popular, young noble.

Abolition of the Latin League

Over the course of the next year and a half, the Romans pursued a policy of laying siege to each of the Latin cities one by one, dividing them so none could offer aid to any of the others. It was during this stage of the war that the Samnites provided auxiliary forces to the Roman effort, joining the two enemies briefly under the same banner. It was in both of their interests to put down the rising Latins before the Roman-Samnite battle for Italian supremacy really got going. No sense in having some third party wild card in the mix. They both agreed on that.

Some of the Latin cities surrendered at the sight of the Roman army, some resisted a little and then gave up and some fought to the bitter end. When it was over, Rome had subdued the entirety of Latium. At this point, the Latin League was abolished and any independent Latin identity was destroyed forever. In the aftermath, the senate gathered and decided the fate of each Latin tribe on a case by case basis. Those who gave up quickly or never joined the rebellion were given full Roman citizenship, those who resisted some were allowed to keep intermarriage and trade rights, but denied the vote, while those who led the revolt were turned off their land and their holdings were colonized by Roman citizens. This treatment of the Latins was typical of official Roman policy. Anyone who was predisposed to friendship and did not resist Roman rule was welcomed openly into the empire and given an array of rights and privileges while those predisposed to hostility and resistance were simply wiped off the map. Most nations or tribes fell into former camp, and found themselves well treated by their new Roman overlords. It was this policy of generosity that secured the longevity of the ethnically diverse empire. That and the ruthless extermination of those tribes and nations who fell into the latter camp.

The stage is now set for one of the most important wars in Roman history, the Second, or Great, Samnite War. It is comparable in historical importance to the Second Punic War, which saw the Romans defeat Carthage and the Macedonian wars, which brought Greece under Roman control. In the Second Samnite War, the Romans, for the first time, set themselves on a course of conscious expansion, with an eye on winning a far-reaching empire. It was a decade long fight, and the Romans nearly lost a number of times, but when it was over, Rome found itself in control of all Italy.

However, before we get into all that, I want to give a fuller account of the Roman legion, how it fought, how it operated and how it was

commanded. The Samnite wars marked a period of transition for the army and this is a good time to take a look at how the Romans had fought in the past and how they would fight in the future. The strategy and tactics and formation of the legion would remain in place for the next 200 years, until Marius reorganized it yet again. Knowing how the legion was organized and how it operated will allow you to visualize the battles of the upcoming Punic Wars better and later, to fully understand why the Romans were able to so decisively defeat the Greeks.

So in the next chapter we will learn about the phalanx, its strengths and weaknesses and why the Romans scrapped it in favor of the manipular system, how many men a centurion actually led (hint: it's not 100), and, just for fun, what the word legion actually means.

Chapter 14

A Phalanx with Joints

To answer one of the most basic question about Rome: Why was it able to control so much territory for so long, one need look no further than the Roman legion. There were a myriad secondary reasons: competent, hands-off administration, sound economic policies and superior engineering skills. However, at the beginning and end of the day it was the legion that secured the longevity of Rome. No fighting force matched it in the ancient world. However, its dominance was not the result of finding a perfect method of organizing and leading men and then sticking to that static model forever. Rather, the Romans constantly tinkered, rearranged and improved the legions depending on circumstance. One of the great virtues of Rome, and one the Romans themselves took immense pride in, was their ability to learn from their own mistakes and adopt the superior methods of their enemies.

When I was in college, I took a course in ancient political theory where we studied Plato and Aristotle, the Sophists and the other Greek thinkers, but when we got to the Romans, apart from some cursory reading of Cicero and Marcus Aurelius my professor taught us legionary infantry tactics and how Roman roads and camps were built. That was Roman political theory, not discourses on the meaning of justice or comparative essays on state organization, but rather how best to build a wall and how to maintain lines of communication in the thick of battle. The Romans did not spend a lot of time with their heads in the clouds, but they did spend a lot of time with their feet in the mud. The power and dominance and stability and legacy of Rome is all wrapped up in its army. Understanding the legions is critical to understanding the Romans and shifts in how the legions operated mirrored shifts in the socio-political world that surrounded them.

Development of the Legions

In general (and this is very general) the army of the Republic had four distinct phases. The first phase was ushered in by Romulus when he founded the army. It was originally formed like any other barbarian horde, with a strong leader leading a mass of men who charged at the enemy and battled hand to hand, one-on-one until one side overpowered the other. The second phase begins roughly with the class reforms of Servius in the mid-500s BC. At this point, the Romans began to utilize the Greek phalanx, relying on a disciplined, group-oriented attack rather than the free-for-all of Romulus's day. This lasted until the mid-300s BC when the Samnite Wars exposed dangerous flaws in the phalanx and forced the Romans to reorganize their entire army and start a third phase, based around the maniples. Later, around 100 BC, Marius ushered in the fourth and final phase of the republican army, instituting a series of reforms affecting not just in how the army fought tactically but also how the soldiers were recruited, removing property qualifications and creating the first full time, professional legions. The professionalization of the Roman legion was a major contributing factor to the death of the Republic and the rise of the Imperium.

We have now reached one of those watershed moments, the mid 300s BC, that saw a transition from the Greek phalanx to the Roman maniples. This transition is of vital importance because it moved Rome from having just another classical Greek hoplite army to having an army that was distinctly Roman.

The Greek Phalanx

The Romans were heavily influenced by the Greeks, not just in art and culture, but also in the employment of arms. In the seventh or eighth century BC, the Greeks adopted a formation of attack called the phalanx, which was composed of individual soldiers called hoplites. The phalanx was the most formidable method of attack in its day and spread throughout the Mediterranean, finding its way to Rome, at around the mid-500s BC. Put simply the Greeks abandoned the chaotic charges of man-to-man fighting in favor of a highly organized formation, which would charge and engage the enemy as one. For hundreds of years the only thing that could stop a phalanx was another phalanx of equal strength, hence the speed of its adoption throughout the western world.

A phalanx was composed of a single line eight to sixteen men deep, depending on the battlefield and number of hoplites available. As a rule of thumb, the deeper the better for phalanxes and there are accounts of phalanxes up to 50 men deep in some battles. Commanders had to make hard choices however because the line had to be long enough to prevent any outflanking maneuvers, which meant certain death, so a balance was always sought between length and depth. At Marathon, the Greeks gambled by spreading their phalanx thin to prevent the numerically superior Persians from outflanking them. The gamble paid off, but the Persians nearly did break the thin Greek line and had they done so, the history of the world might have been altered drastically.

During battle the men in the front line held their oval shields, called *hoplons* (hence the name hoplite) in their left hands and long spears in their right. The hoplites stood close together and in a such a way that a soldier's shield protected the man on his left and was himself protected by the man on his right. This formed a shield wall that was virtually impenetrable. In between the shields the spears of the second, third and sometimes fourth ranks shot through the gaps stabbing and gorging anything they could. A mass of individual fighters would simply be massacred if they attempted a head on attack. They would be unable to break through a well-disciplined phalanx.

I know what you're thinking: If a phalanx was eight or twelve or sixteen men deep and only the front four were attacking, what were the other four, eight or twelve lines doing? The answer is three fold, but all three folds relate to the all-important task of maintaining cohesion. The first fold is that as the phalanxes initially charged at

each other and in the subsequent shoving match, the front lines had to be braced by the men behind them so they could not be pushed backward. The second fold is that the most common way a phalanx was broken was by retreat from the rear. Once men started running out the back, there was no more bracing, no more support and the other army could push through. A deep line meant removing those back ranks from danger and hence removing their desire to run away. The man in the back line a sixteen deep phalanx was in no danger of being run through with a spear so he wasn't going to run. The third fold is that the stable back ranks prevented the men in front, who really were in physical danger, from running despite being scared. If anyone in the front ran then the whole thing would break down and everyone would be slaughtered.

Now I know what you're thinking again and the answer is yes, the first few ranks of a phalanx was a really, really crappy place to be—trapped between an enemy who was trying to kill you and friends who forced you to stay even as they sat on the sidelines. The only way to live if you were in the front was to stick together and move forward, so there was a motivational element to the formation as well. There was, indeed, a lot of psychology built into the phalanx, maybe all that philosophizing on the human condition paid off. In a warrior society like Greece, though, men clamored to be in the front ranks because that is where all the honor and glory was, and where commanders placed their best men, so they didn't think the front was such a bad place to be. To each his own I guess.

The phalanx was designed for and used on flat open plains where the ranks could be deployed properly and where there would be no holes in the line. In a phalanx, a single gap meant death. The survival of the army was dependent on an unbroken shield wall. In Greece this worked well because both sides used phalanxes and both sought the same sort of terrain. However, against an army who used vastly different tactics on unstable hilly terrain, the phalanx was vulnerable, a fact the Romans would learn the hard way.

In the hundreds of years that the Romans had used the standard phalanx, they had been well served because they were fighting either other phalanxes or Gallic hordes who were no match for a solid shield wall with hundreds of spears jutting out of it. However, when they met the Samnites, the weakness of the phalanx became all too apparent. The steep, rough country of Samnium where most of the fighting in the Samnite Wars took place, made it difficult to deploy and maintain a cohesive phalanx, plus the Samnite light infantry and cavalry, used to the terrain, were able to easily outflank the Roman

phalanx and an outflanked legion was as good as dead.

This fatal flaw spelled the end of Roman use of the phalanx. It was simply not maneuverable enough. When attacking head on, a phalanx was indestructible, but once hit from the side or back it was a sitting duck. The densely packed soldiers simply could not turn and set up the critical defensive shield wall in time, encumbered as they were with heavy shields and long spears. If given enough time the left or right hand column could reform into a front line, but in battle time was measured in seconds and a cavalry detachment that managed to get around the line was charging through the ranks in a heartbeat, slaughtering the closely packed hoplites who could not turn to defend themselves. This is why the phalanx had to avoid being outflanked at all costs and why, when the Samnites proved they could get around the Romans, the Romans changed forever their organizational deployment to develop an immunity to this chronic disease.

What the Romans developed was the system that has been handed down as the classic Republican army formation, the manipular system and its three line deployment, is famously referred to as “a phalanx with joints.”

The Roman Maniple

The new organizational structure that was adopted during the Samnite Wars would remain the standard for 250-odd years, until the Marian reform of 107 BC and became known to history as the maniple system.

It was called the maniple system because it was based around a tactical unit of 120 men, called a maniple, which roughly translates as “a handful.” This unit was capable of acting independently of the rest of the army or in concert with the whole, giving Roman commanders an advantage over their predecessors, who had to deal with the bulky single line of a phalanx, designed only for closely coordinated forward movement. A general could now order off a single maniple to secure a ridge or plug a hole or turn to face an enemy from behind without jeopardizing the cohesion of the rest of the army. The new Roman general had another advantage over his predecessor: The Romans abandoned the single line in favor of a staggered three line deployment.

At the outset of battle the lines formed with ten maniples in the front, ten in the middle and ten half maniples in the back, arrayed in a checkerboard fashion. Some sources say there were fifteen maniples in the front line and some say there were fifteen in the front two. The specifics are hard to weed out, due to the lack of source material and the competing claims therein. So while the 10:10:10 seems to be the general consensus the jury is still out. Somewhere between ten and fifteen in the front two lines anyway, and definitely ten in the back. The front line maniples were made up of the youngest and most inexperienced soldiers, generally aged 16-20 out on their first campaigns. The second line was made up of soldiers in the prime of their lives, between the ages of 20 and 40. The back line was made of the oldest troops, veterans of countless campaigns with all the wisdom and skill that follows from age and experience.

Organizationally, each single maniple had four officers: two front, senior centurions and two rear, junior centurions. They were called centurions because they commanded a single century, the most basic organizational unit of the army (a maniple was composed of two centuries). A Roman army century was not composed of a hundred men, as is commonly and mistakenly believed, but rather 60-80 men. The senior of the two senior centurions was the commander of the maniple and placed at the front right when in battle. The centurions were expected to lead by example, and be the first ones in and last ones out of any battle. The mortality rate among centurions was the highest in the army, but again, as with the front ranks of the phalanx,

men clamored for the position because of the honor it brought them and their families.

The basic tactical theory was to attack first with the front line only, who, being young, were strong and served as shock troops. Ideally, the rest of the army would never attack and the front line would take care of the enemy, but this rarely happened. Inevitably, the second line would be ordered in to support the front. These troops, hardened, strong, and experienced were usually enough to secure victory. The enemy, worn down from fighting the Roman youth would be no match for those youth plus an equal number of veterans. If this was not enough however, the last line was ordered to support. If this back line got involved it meant that things were not going well for the Romans, but the old men were usually enough to break the back of a particularly stubborn enemy.

The maniple system was highly disciplined and based on the principle of time-release freshness. Rome's enemies would attack all at once with great fervor. Often over-exerting themselves by the belief that they could overwhelm the front Roman line easily and move on to the rest of the army. However, things were rarely that easy and, bogged down by the front line Roman youth, the opposing armies became fatigued and were routed when the rest of the Roman army got involved.

Further Elements of a Legion

Beyond the three basic lines of heavy infantry, there were three other important elements needed to complete the legion as it lined up for battle. First, there was the light infantry, made up of men rich enough to qualify for service, but too poor to afford all the gear needed to survive in heavy infantry fighting. In any given legion there were between 1,000 and 1,200 of these fighters, who at the beginning of a battle stood in front of the three lines to mask the size and formation of the Roman army. When the signal for battle was given, the light infantry would rush the enemy and hurl spears or javelins, attempting to disrupt the cohesion and inflict some minor damage, before retreating quickly through the three lines to the back of the legion. Light infantry never made a difference in the actual fighting, having served their purpose if the enemy remained in the dark about Roman formations and eventually, when the state began to take responsibility for arming the soldiers, the light troops were phased out and folded into the rest of the lines.

On the wings, as was typical of the day, the Romans placed the cavalry. Their job was to engage the opposing cavalry and take them out of the fight, so the two infantry lines had to fight head to head without help, a fight the Romans always felt they could win. Once the opposing cavalry was out of the way, then the Roman cavalry plunged into the enemy lines and attempted to do as much damage as they could. In addition to these two basic tasks, the cavalry was always watchful of potential flanking maneuvers or surprise attacks from the rear. The cavalry was initially made up of the richest Romans, the equites, but as the years passed, the Romans farmed out cavalry work to their allies, never being great horsemen themselves.

The allies were the third element needed to complete a standard legion. Also stationed on the wings, between the Roman lines and the cavalry, the allies were somewhere in between heavy and light cavalry. Through the republican period they were led by Roman officers, but as time went on they were led by their own chiefs or generals. The allies were required to contribute an equal number of infantry and twice the cavalry that the Romans themselves provided. These draft requirements would cause constant tension between Rome and her subjects and was the main cause for the Latin War, the Latins were tired of sharing equally in the burdens, but getting shafted on the spoils.

In total the Roman fighting strength was optimally between 8,000 and 10,000 men. With 4,200 Roman legionaries, an equal number of

allies and just shy of 1,000 cavalry. The numbers varied, depending on the time, place and mitigating factors and these numbers are approximate, but will give you some idea of the size of a legion as it marched into battle. When it marched from place to place though, it was attended by a baggage train of non-combatants numbering themselves in the thousands. It would not be surprising to see a legion of 4,200 men marching through the countryside 15,000 strong.

Legionary Tactics

When actually engaging the enemy, the Roman tactics were straightforward. Each soldier was equipped with two spears and a sword. As they approached the enemy they hurled the spears to inflict as much damage as they could before meeting them hand to hand. This differed little in theory from today's artillery, which is supposed to soften the enemy up for infantry attack. The Romans experimented with the composition and design of their spears, settling generally on an instrument that had a thin metal connector between the blade and the shaft, so when the spear struck its target, the thin metal connector would bend under the weight of the heavy shaft behind it. This served two purposes. It weighed down soldiers whose shields had been struck and it also made the Roman spears unusable to the enemy, for it was common practice in the ancient world to throw back spears hurled by the opposing army.

When the gap between the armies closed, the legionaries pulled out short swords. Double edged and sharp at the tip, they could be used either for stabbing or slashing and were incredibly destructive in close quarters. The famous gladius has not appeared yet in our narrative; it emerged after the Romans encountered Spanish sword craft in the next century, but the principles behind the famous sword were already present. Once engaged in hand to hand combat it was simply a matter of killing or wounding everything that moved until the enemy broke and fled.

In addition to these forward, offensive minded tactics, the new maniple system also had a built in defensive strategy. If the front line was overwhelmed it could quickly retreat between the gaps in the middle line and regroup behind the far more capable experienced soldiers; if they faltered then they could hide behind the third line, and by this time the first line would be ready to fight again which allowed the Romans to retreat without having it devolve into a frightened and disorganized flee-for-all. The phalanx lacked this element and once it broke, it was every man for himself. The maniple system also had the advantage of being far harder to flank than a phalanx. Any attempt to do so would be met either by the cavalry, by back-line maniples being ordered forward, or by front line maniples themselves peeling off from the main fight and advancing in a different direction. All in all it was a significant advance from the phalanx, and as we will later see, when the Romans clashed with the Macedonians around 200 BC the result would be a clear and decisive victory of maniple over phalanx.

However, it was not just the system that made the legion so dominant, not anyone could be inserted with the same result, nor was it the case that the Romans were bigger or stronger than their opponents, in fact in many cases facing huge lumbering Germanic tribes, the Romans looked puny by comparison. Rather, the legions prevailed because of a group discipline that became the nightmare of opposing armies. In general, ancient warfare was a passionate affair with lots of yelling, chest-beating and frenzy. The Roman legion was a cold inhuman machine. They were never intimidated and rarely broke ranks. Their comrades could be dying to the right and left but the legionary himself seemed unaffected and kept moving forward. This was unsettling and sapped the moral of Rome's enemies. The Roman soldier did this not because he was unfeeling, quite the contrary, the Romans were a passionate people, but in war, there was one thing a legionary feared more than the enemy: his commanding officer.

Roman Discipline

Roman discipline was notoriously harsh, though it was not without its positive aspects. It was based on a system of rewards and punishments that were designed to promote bravery and eliminate cowardice. Punishment ranged anywhere from psychological humiliation (for example a disgraced century might be forced to eat standing up, so their comrades would always know who lost their standard) to scourging for disobeying orders, up to death, a punishment that was handed down routinely when the actions of an individual put the entire army at risk, like, for example falling asleep while on sentry duty. Woe to the sentry who fell asleep, he was stoned and beaten to death by his comrades. Keeping watch was a sacred trust that could not be breached under any circumstances; it was simply too important.

On the flip-side, the Romans invented a plethora of fancy medals and awards for soldiers who distinguished themselves in battle. I have already talked about the grass crown given to a soldier who saves an entire legion, but there were literally hundreds of other honors. For example, an award was given to the first man over a wall when the army was assaulting an enemy camp or city. These rewards were not taken lightly. Entire centuries, lines and legions took it as a matter of great pride when one of their own took the prize, so when competing claims were brought to the attention of a commander, great care had to be taken in adjudicating the decision. The most common rewards ranged from double rations (a huge motivator) to promises of more land when released from service to heads of cattle, anything a soldier valued would be meted out for instances of selfless bravery which the Roman commanders were always promoting. There was a darkly humorous case during the Second Punic War of a commander promising extra rations for every enemy head brought back to camp. However, the soldiers became so burdened by the work of beheading and carrying heads that they began to lose the battle, and in the heat of fighting the commander had to issue a proclamation that everyone would receive the extra rations regardless of the heads, but they did have to win the fight, which the soldiers, (now free of their grisly baggage) promptly did.

This discipline allowed the Romans to keep cool in battle and keep plugging away rather than running. They knew what would happen if their corpse was found on the field with a wound in the back: they would be buried without honor and their family would be ostracized. Those who fled from Cannae, one of the greatest defeats in Roman history were never allowed to return home, remaining in exile,

fighting in Sicily until finally they were allowed to serve as bait for Hannibal and die with dignity in a suicide mission. This steadfast obstinacy of the Romans keeps coming back. They weren't going to give up, they weren't going to quit, they were going to outlast everyone, every time.

Logistics

One final detail about the superiority of the Roman legion over its enemies was its meticulous attention to details. It is often said that amateurs study tactics but professionals study logistics and the Romans embodied this belief. They took great care to always preserve their supply lines, communication lines and set up their camps in the most defensible positions. This last was critical because, the Greeks for example, set up their camps simply to be close to the site of battle without thought of other practical considerations. The Romans, however, took great care in ensuring they held the high ground and were in a well defensible position. A routed Roman army often staved off final defeat behind the walls of their camps, and many Roman victories were secured by overrunning the poorly conceived camps of their enemies.

The Romans scouted and protected sources of food and fresh water, and knowing that this often meant the difference between a strong army in the field and a weak one, and always sought to cut off the food and water supplies of their enemies before engaging in battle. Battles were often won or lost based on nothing more than a good breakfast on the day of a battle. So as much time as they spent trying to figure out how to neutralize opposing cavalry, they spent ten times as much time thinking about how to secure pasture for their own horses. It was the boring logistics of making sure everyone had proper footwear and that the trenches were dug to a proper depth that really set the Roman apart from their enemies who had every intention of just showing up for a fight. The Romans never just showed up for a fight, they planned everything down to the smallest detail. The fight itself became almost an afterthought.

So there you have it, the Roman legion of the Republic. Three lines made up of units of 120 men with cavalry and allies protecting the wings. More versatile than the phalanx, the manipular system would remain largely unchanged for the next 250 years and it would be this incarnation of the Roman legion that did most of Rome's territorial expansion. When we get to Marius, I will discuss at length the changes he introduced and how they changed the face of Rome forever. However, that is for another time. Next chapter we get back to the action as Rome prepares for her longest and most grueling challenge to date, the Second, or Great Samnite War.

Chapter 15

The Second Samnite War

326 – 304

The Romans enjoyed ten years of peace after the end of the Latin War in 338 BC and spent the years quietly expanding their territory. This decade saw the emergence of a new attitude toward territorial expansion. It was no longer enough to merely ensure the survival of Rome by controlling Latium and fending off intruders. The Romans now sought to spread their influence over a much wider geographic area in order to draw taxes and manpower from a larger population base. No one power had controlled the entire Italian peninsula before, but the Romans started to think that maybe they could. They essentially looked around Italy, sized up the competition, liked their odds and went for it. The Samnites were their main threat and the Romans knew that if they could conquer the powerful hill tribe, nothing would stand in their way. However, the Romans were loath to simply expand, that would be immoral. The Romans only engaged in just wars, when they or one of their allies were threatened. They would never declare war without provocation. That was considered barbaric, so they set about needling the Samnites into attacking first so Rome could enter the war it wanted honorably.

Provoking a War

Rome dispatched citizens to form a colony in Samnite territory, figuring the Samnites would either let them get away with it, and the Romans would have gained more land without drawing swords, or the Samnites would attack and the Romans could come to the rescue of their besieged citizens. Things did not go exactly according to Roman design, but in the end they got their war. The Samnites were caught up fighting Alexander of Epirus (the father of Pyrrhus who we will make an appearance in Italy in later chapters) in the south and could not immediately

respond to the Roman settlement. So the Romans, emboldened, set up another colony. When the Samnites concluded their war with Alexander, they turned west, but it was not to directly engage the Roman colonies. Rather they moved on the Greek city of Neapolis (present day Naples), forging an agreement with its citizens to aid their dream of expanding along the coast and into greater Campania.

The nobility of Neapolis, however, dismayed at the Samnite garrison and the loss of control over their city, turned to Rome for assistance. It was the call Rome was looking for, but it was something of a letdown. Fighting the Samnites in Campania would not garner them any more land if they won, which was the whole point of provoking the Samnites. However, they were reluctant to pass up the opportunity and agreed to help the Neapolitan nobility to drive off the Samnite garrison, which they did, sparking the Second Samnite War in 327 BC.

Papirius the ShriII

The early momentum was clearly in Roman hands. Samnite allies were peeled off and the Romans won victory after victory on the battlefield. In fact, the only major defeat for the Romans in these early years came as a result not of Samnite strength, but of a mutiny by the Roman army against their commander, the result of an extended melodrama, which is too juicy not to relate in detail.

In 325 BC, Lucius Papirius Cursor was appointed dictator to oversee the war effort, and Quintus Fabius Maximus (the grandfather of Fabius the Delayer, who saw Rome through the early disastrous years of the Second Punic War, 218-202 BC) was named his Master of Horse. They set out for Samnium, but the taking of the auspices, a critical religious step for all Roman endeavors, had been done poorly or showed ill omens. Whatever was wrong, Papirius decided to head back to Rome and retake them in an attempt to secure a favorable sign from the gods. He very clearly ordered Fabius to not engage the Samnites while he was gone, but Fabius, being young, could not restrain himself. The Samnites, knowing the Roman commander was away, were relaxed, believing no battle imminent. Fabius, on his own initiative, decided it was a perfect time for a sneak attack. He ordered the army out, routing the surprised Samnites easily, capturing their camp and a great deal of plunder.

When Papirius returned, however, he was enraged, really enraged. How could Fabius have so clearly disobeyed him, when the whole purpose for leaving was to align Roman interests with the gods' favor. By attacking before securing favorable auspices Fabius endangered not just the army but Rome as a whole. Then, singing the praises of Manlius who, you will recall, executed his own son for disobedience, Papirius ordered Fabius arrested. The army was incredulous, they had just won an easy victory thanks to Fabius's decisive action, and now Papirius wanted to punish him? It was absurd. The general feeling was that Papirius was simply jealous for missing out on the glory. Despite entreaties from the officers, Papirius insisted on Fabius's arrest. A slow moving riot began to build, which was cut off only by nightfall.

During the night, Fabius, understanding that Papirius had every intention of executing him in the morning, escaped from the camp and made for Rome with all haste. Upon reaching the city Fabius and his father (who had previously been consul and was a man of high standing) went before the senate to plead the young man's case. Papirius showed up and the scene from the camp was repeated. Papirius was a towering inferno of rage. He railed against Fabius's

disobedience and sacrilege and pointed to the irreparable harm the boy had done to army discipline and the moral fiber of the state itself.

There was nothing untrue about what Papirius said, but the senate pleaded with him to go easy on Fabius. He was a popular, young noble and, after all, had just won a great victory, wasn't Papirius taking this all just a bit too far? By this point Papirius was getting shrill and, I can't help but picture the senators looking sideways at each other as he launched into another red-faced harangue and thinking that he just needed to relax a little. In the end, when it became clear that absolutely no one supported him, Papirius attempted to salvage some dignity not just for himself but for the office of dictator which was in danger of becoming irrelevant. He agreed to lift the sentence of death and content himself with stripping Fabius of his power and leaving him behind in Rome. Returning to the army, Papirius ordered his troops to pursue and engage the re-formed Samnite army, but this time, instead of an easy victory, the Samnites managed to get the upper hand. The Roman soldiers, who loved Fabius and hated Papirius, had no intention of letting the dictator win any battles so they, in effect, threw the battle.

Papirius though, did not ride off into the history books as a shrill and overbearing failure, and to his credit he saw the error of his ways. He had come down too harshly on Fabius and lost the support of his troops. So he spent the next few days endearing himself to them, visiting the wounded and treading lightly with discipline. He won back the favor of the men and when he ordered them out to fight the next time, they did not disappoint and delivered to him the victory he sought. Over the course of the war, Papirius would serve as consul four times and, when he finally did ride off into the history books, he was remembered as a great commander and one of the best men of his generation.

The Battle of the Caudine Forks — 321 BC

After Papirius's victory, the Samnites sued for peace but the Roman senate demanded such terms that the Samnites could not accept and the war continued. It would prove to be a mistake of the highest order, because the Romans were about to walk into one of their greatest, and arguably most humiliating defeats in their history. At least at Cannae the Roman army was beaten in the field, but the Battle of the Caudine Forks ended with the Romans so completely outmaneuvered that their army never even drew their swords before offering them to the Samnites in surrender. Many saw it as punishment for the hubris Rome had shown toward the Samnite peace envoys. The defeat at Caudine Forks, however, just as the defeat at Cannae a century later, did nothing less than prove that the Romans were cut from a completely different cloth than their contemporaries. Any other state, when faced with such catastrophic defeats would have quit and prayed for mercy, but the Romans never gave it a thought. They never quit. They just kept coming.

At Caudine Forks, the Romans were set up perfectly by the Samnite commander, Gaius Pontius. He dispatched some of his soldiers into Roman territory masquerading as noncombatant herdsman. When they inevitably fell into the hands of Roman patrols, they all told the same story to their captors: the full force of the Samnite army was besieging the city of Luceria, a Roman ally. The Romans, hearing this information repeated from multiple sources bought the story hook line and sinker. They sent both consuls, with their armies to aid Luceria, but, of course, the Samnites were nowhere near Luceria. They were stationed near Caudium, specifically at the pass the Romans would have to travel through to get to Luceria. Called the Caudine Forks, the pass started very narrow, then opened onto a wide plain then became very narrow again on the way out. On either side steep peaks prevented any movement except forwards or backwards. The consuls led their army hastily into the pass believing the danger was ahead of them in Luceria. However, when they reached the other side of the flat plain, they found their exit blocked by a pile of boulders. Sensing that something was amiss the consuls immediately ordered a retreat, but by this time it was too late, the Samnites had already barricaded the other end as well. The Roman army was trapped and in a hopeless position. Soldiers joked darkly about their pointless labor as the consuls ordered them to build a fortified camp. There was no getting out and there would be no attack to repel, the Samnites would simply wait the requisite three days for them to run out of food and demand surrender.

The consuls and their officers recognized the immensity of their blunder as they tossed about impossible escape plans. The next morning Pontius sent for his father, who, though retired, was a great military strategist and asked for the old man's advice about what to do with the trapped Romans. At first his father sent word that Pontius should let the army walk away unharmed. Unsure of the message, for it seemed a crazy notion, Pontius sent for clarification and when word came again, the message had changed, it now read: kill them all down to the last man. This sounded more like his father, but Pontius was confused and unsure, perhaps the old man had slipped into senility, hadn't he just said let them all go? So he asked his father to join him at Caudium.

When the old man arrived he told his son he still retained his senses and neither message had been a mistake. The best option by far, he said, was to spare the army and return them unharmed to Rome, for in doing so they would win the eternal friendship and gratitude of the Roman people and hostilities would end forever. The second best option was to kill them all, and end hostilities for at least a generation by decimating Rome's available manpower and filling the Roman populace with terror. There are no other options, the old man said: extreme generosity or extreme cruelty, that was it. However, Pontius was unnerved by both and settled on a third option that his father warned him would win no friends and eliminate no enemies. He would let the army go, but force them to surrender under the yoke, a humiliating ritual in which the defeated army must pass beneath a horizontal spear lashed to two vertical spears, creating a gate of sorts that the soldiers had to stoop to pass beneath. To the honor crazed armies of the ancient world, this humiliation was far worse than being killed on the battlefield. Far, far worse.

For the men who surrendered at Caudine, their humiliation would be doubled because they never even drew their swords. They never had the opportunity to die gloriously in battle and take as many Samnites as they could with them. It was absolutely unheard of to give up without a fight and the thought of it mortally offended every soldier in the army, but their orders were clear and pass under the yolk they did. The army that marched back to Rome was unlike any other that had gone before it or would come after, they marched weaponless and in complete silence, walking and eating without saying a word or even looking up from the ground. Some said that the Samnites had defeated the spirit of Rome itself, but the wise warned that this was unlikely, that the silent army was not devoid of spirit, but merely smoldering with such an intense rage that words could not express their emotions — and woe to those upon whom Rome's fury

would be unleashed.

The terms of the peace also called for 600 cavalry men (i.e. the sons of the richest men in Rome) to be held as hostages as well as for the consuls and their officers to become Guarantors of the Peace: a half-religious, half-legal title. In effect, it meant that upon their return to Rome, they must force the senate and people to accept the terms of peace offered at the battlefield. If they did not the gods would punish Rome as a whole if the Guarantors, who were in breach of their duty, did not hand themselves back over to Samnites where they would be sold as slaves. This threat was supposed to be enough to compel even unhappy Guarantors to do their duty, and it usually was. However, the Romans were cut from a different cloth.

It is unclear at what point Postumius, one of the consuls, decided to breach the trust, whether it was his plan all along or whether he decided to do so after reaching Rome. However, when he stood before the senate and delivered the official account of the events leading up to the surrender and of the terms of peace, he urged them to reject the Samnites' offer and immediately re-raise the army and attack. He and his colleague had been foolish, but that did not mean Rome itself should admit defeat. Furthermore, he said, he and his officers would immediately march back to where Pontius waited for word and surrender themselves, releasing Rome from its obligation to honor the terms of the treaty. The senate, who had been ready to castigate Postumius in the harshest terms now praised him to the heavens.

The two consuls and their officers, with a priest in tow to witness the event, returned to the Samnite army and surrendered, announcing that Rome rejected peace and did so with the full favor of the gods. Pontius was incensed and refused to accept the surrender, claiming that the Romans were just trying to use a legalistic reading of the pact to avoid being defeated. No one who swore to be a Guarantor abandoned his duty and thought that just by surrendering himself he had absolved his nation of guilt. It was outrageous. However, that is exactly what Postumius was doing.

If Rome wanted to play chicken with the gods that was fine with Pontius, and ordered his men to let Postumius and his officers walk away unmolested, so the offer of surrender would never be accepted and the pact, from the Samnite perspective, would remain in breach.

The Five Year Peace

How much of this story is propaganda and how much is true is up in the air. There is no doubt though that following the defeat at the Caudine Forks, there was a five-year lull in hostilities. It seems reasonable that the five years of peace were somehow related to the terms of surrender, but according to the Romans, they never recognized any peace and were free to continue fighting if they wished. It seems likely that the story of Postumius's surrender is overblown. It mirrors closely a story from the First Punic War in which a captured general is returned to Rome to secure a peace treaty, but instead tells the senate to keep fighting and then honorably returns to Carthage where the promise of torture and death awaited him. However, even if the Romans had believed they could keep fighting, unbound by any treaty, that did not mean they would have wanted to. The Caudine Forks in 321 BC had been a humiliation, and the Romans would have had no interest in allowing history to repeat itself. Perhaps the five-year lull was simply the Romans being cautious. Clearly, the Samnites were cleverer than they had been given credit for. There was no sense in giving them the opportunity to crush Rome's dreams of empire so soon after it had been fully articulated. The Romans would bide their time, patience was another great Roman virtue. They were in no hurry, they just wanted to be sure of victory. Most likely though a five-year peace was forced on the Romans, who had no choice but to submit to Samnite terms.

With the renewal of hostilities in 316 BC the Etruscans in the north and the Greeks in the south would both get involved, creating a struggle that embroiled all the major powers in Italy.

Back to Work

The Romans licked their wounds, or perhaps more accurately, nursed their egos after the defeat at Caudine Forks in 321 BC. Five years passed with the Romans engaging their neighbors in minor skirmishes, but avoiding another major confrontation with the Samnites. All that changed in 316 BC when the Romans, confident once again, marched out and attempted again to conquer Samnium. This second stage of the war started out no better for the Romans than the first had ended, but they soon gained the upper hand and after ten years of hard fighting the Romans would force the Samnites to submit in 304 BC.

In the race to victory however, the Romans stumbled at the very beginning. In 315 BC, they met the Samnites near Lautulae and were defeated in convincing fashion. Details of the battle are sketchy, but it appears certain that the dictator commanding the Roman legion was killed in the fighting. Rome's power was now on the verge of completely unraveling. They had lost a major battle at Caudine without a fight and now, when they actually took the field against the Samnites, they were soundly beaten. Things were not looking good for the Romans. Campania, the territory over which Rome and Samnium had originally clashed was perilously close to abandoning its treaty with Rome, so recently entered into, and giving themselves over to the Samnites. Tarentum, a major Greek city in the south, had already declared for the Samnites and now negotiations had begun to bring the Etruscans into the fray. However, the Etruscans thought they were joining the winning side when Samnite power was at its peak and, when they did enter the war, found themselves overmatched by a newly resurgent Rome.

It was during these years that the Romans began to radically alter the legion's organization and tactics, switching from the clunky phalanx into the maneuverable three-line manipular system. Once the structural deficiencies of their army were ironed out, Rome's advantage in wealth and manpower left little doubt as to the final outcome of the war.

One of the ways that wealth manifested itself as an aid to the war effort was in an infrastructure project that survives today, a living monument to Roman engineering genius: The Via Appia, or Appian Way.

Appius Claudius the Blind

During the First Samnite War, though they emerged victorious, the Romans struggled constantly to move troops and supplies south into Campania and Samnium in anything resembling military efficiency. Wet marshy land separated the two points, literally bogging down efforts. Roads through the foothills above were too hazardous and the only other route was a long, arduous trip along the coast. The Romans needed a way to get into Campania quickly and began to entertain the idea of building a straight road linking Rome and Capua, the capital city of Campania. The proposals never got off the ground as resources were tied up first with the Latin War then again with the Samnites but in 312 BC a man came forward with the vision and will to accomplish the goal.

Appius Claudius, whose name was attached to the road for his efforts, was a member in good standing of one of the more controversial families in Rome, the Claudii. Implacable foes of the plebeians, the Claudii never lacked for enemies. Indeed, it had been another Appius Claudius who had headed the decemviri in its efforts to consolidate power after compiling the Twelve Tables of Law around 450 BC. However, the Appius Claudius of whom we speak today outdid them all in pomposity and pretensions to infallibility. He remains one of the most interesting and infamous figures in Roman history, both the driving force behind some of the most ambitious public works projects in history and a man who seemed coolly untroubled despite ignoring constitutional and religious precedents.

Claudius was elected censor, an office of enormous importance, in 312 BC along with a colleague. One of the critical functions of the censors at this point was to declare who was eligible for the senate and who was eligible to vote. Claudius rather than simply following the previous year's rolls, as was the custom, decided to drastically alter the composition of the senate and the electorate, expelling members he considered his enemies and enrolling men who promised him loyalty. Aghast, his colleague resigned, knowing that if he did so Claudius would be stopped because any time one censor died or resigned the other stepped down so two fresh censors could stand in their place. However, Claudius refused to step down, sparking a minor constitutional crisis. The manipulated senate, however, made of senators who owed their office to Claudius, predictably remained silent. Despite calls for his head, Claudius remained in office. He then further infuriated public opinion by taking certain sacred rites away from a family he disapproved of and passing them into the hands of public slaves. For this offense Claudius was allegedly struck blind,

though accounts of his eyesight loss do not crop up until later in the annals and then only seem to describe his final days as an old, blind Claudius declaring Rome's determined opposition to Pyrrhus's invasion.

In any event, blind or not, Claudius set to work on his pet projects, two of which stood foremost in his mind, the road to Capua and a series of aqueducts that would guarantee a fresh water supply for Rome. He directed money from the treasury and manpower from other projects to accomplish the tasks. The Romans had finally accepted Claudius as single censor and applauded his lead in the public works, but he set off a fresh firestorm when his term of office expired after 18 months. He shocked everyone by declaring that he would not be stepping down. Rome was aghast at this sacrilege. He had sworn an oath to step down and he flouted it with all the hubris of a tragic Greek hero.

In the end Claudius would remain censor for five years, generally upsetting constitutional purists but endearing himself to the people with his liberal dispensations from the treasury, the obvious benefits of his projects and his policies on enfranchisement, for he extended the vote to landless citizens who otherwise had no voice at all. He proved sufficiently popular that when he stepped down he immediately won election as consul.

In later years, the scandals of Appius Claudius were largely forgotten and he was remembered first and foremost as the man who gave the Romans their most important road and their most important network of aqueducts. The Appian Way, after it had served its immediate military purpose, would evolve into the main artery of travel and trade for the Romans, eventually stretching over 500 miles southeast across the peninsula.

Equipped with their new road made of stone, bowed to prevent water collection and supported by retaining walls, the Romans were now able to keep their troops in Samnium far better supplied than before and the war began to slowly turn against the Samnites.

The Tide Turns

The Roman strategy was straightforward, though it took years to see it through to the end. The Samnites, unlike their neighbors in the lowlands, did not concentrate in large cities and as a result there was no one place the Romans could target to bring a swift conclusion to hostilities. They had to proceed piecemeal, cutting off Samnite communities from each other by holding the mountain passes and building fortresses along navigable rivers. Once an area was secure the Romans could move on, at all times doing their best to cut off supply routes and access to summer or winter pasture and so disrupt the entire Samnite way of life. In this way, the Romans slowly hemmed the Samnites and annexed more and more of their territory, sending in colonists and taking possession of Samnium bit by little bit.

The Etruscans Enter the War

The Samnites, however, were not the only enemy the Romans now faced, the Etruscans, mustering what solidarity they could, rose up in arms in 311 BC and opened a whole new theater of operations. Each year the Romans designated one of their consuls to handle operations in Samnium while the other went north to Etruria. It speaks volumes of the manpower and wealth available to Rome that they were able to run wars on two completely separate fronts and emerge victorious from both.

The Romans were largely in control of events for most of the decade, with the senate truly gripped by panic only once (in 310 BC) and even then it was a panic from a lack of information rather than any true danger. In the north, the consul in charge, former insubordinate Master of the Horse Quintus Fabius went off the radar for a while. He had defeated an Etruscan army and the survivors had fled into the Ciminian Forest, a dense, road-less, wooded area, which was off limits to the superstitious Romans. However, Fabius decided reports about Rodents of Unusual Size lurking in the forest were overblown (or any other superstition you might think of) and took his army in. He was out of contact for some time, which would have been a cause for concern but not alarm had not his colleague in Samnium been wounded in battle at the same time. The senate back in Rome received word that one consul was injured, it was unclear how badly, and the other had led his army into the evil woods of the Ciminian Forest, and began to panic. However, the consul in Samnium recovered from his injuries quickly and Quintus Fabius was actually in the process of securing an alliance with the people who dwelled inside the Ciminian, but the senate knew none of this

Papirius Cursor, the man had ordered the execution of young Fabius, was appointed dictator and led an army of fresh recruits into Etruria to track down the lost legions. When he arrived, Fabius had already emerged from the woods, new allies in tow. He was surprised and horrified to find that his command had been given to Papirius, toward whom he understandably bore some resentment. However, he submitted to the senate's will and allowed Papirius to take command. Together they led their combined army against the regrouped Etruscans near Lake Vadimo. The resulting battle was the only clash with the Etruscans that was ever in doubt. All three Roman lines became involved and the tide did not turn until late in the day. The Etruscans however eventually broke and fled. They never again caused the Romans serious trouble. Surrendering in 308 BC, they left the Samnites to carry on alone.

The Samnites Defeated

The Samnites were now in desperate straits. They were having difficulty with their supply lines, their armies could not link up with one another. They were constantly outnumbered and their communities were beginning to suffer terribly under what was, in essence, a massive siege, not of a city but of an entire territory.

The Samnites held on as long as they could but finally, reluctantly sued for peace in 304 BC. They had lost a great deal of their territory and the Romans had founded 13 colonies in and around Samnium. In the north, the Romans had pushed deep into Etruscan territory and either controlled by arms or alliance most of what had once been the most powerful confederation in Italy. Roman garrisons were quartered across the peninsula, leaving only the Greek controlled south untouched by Roman power.

Impact of the War

The Second Samnite War had been an incredibly transformative period. Italy had gone from being a land of fractured and competing sovereignties to a land under the control of a single power. Roman citizenship was extended in its various gradient forms to tribes across the peninsula, who recognized more and more that their future prosperity would be determined by their relationship with Rome.

At this point, Roman domination was by no means complete. Just as many fought the Romans as acquiesced or welcomed them with open arms. However, the Romans treated those who submitted without a fight generously, giving them full access to Roman prosperity. Although regions gave up their sovereignty and were required to submit soldiers for the legions, they received a share of the spoils and were allowed, as was the standard Roman practice, a great deal of latitude in their own local rule.

The Romans themselves also changed. The makeup of the legion was now radically different than it had been, with its strategy, tactics and organization completely overhauled. However, the completion of the Appian Way and the aqueducts, so impressive in their scope and so well conceived in their construction signaled a change in the Romans as a whole, as they began to outpace their contemporaries in their level of civilization. Rome, in short, was becoming the Rome we think of and remember today, the Rome that keeps us fascinated 1500 years after the fall of its empire.

The Samnites, however, were not done yet. After 10 years of peace they realized that any treaty with Rome meant an end to their independence forever. Rome was moving inexorably in the direction of imperial master, not simply powerful neighbor. In a last desperate play for general Italian independence, the Samnites organized and led a coalition that included the Etruscans, the Umbrians, and even the Gauls against Roman power. This alliance led to the Third Samnite War, though the name is a misnomer. It was really Rome vs Everyone. And in this war against everyone, Rome would win and everyone else would lose.

Chapter 16

The Third Samnite War

298-290

As the 300s gave way to the 200s BC, Rome found itself the *de facto* master of Italy. It was not yet official, but for all intents and purposes, Italy was Rome's. Certainly, the Romans saw themselves as being in charge, and their actions in the immediate aftermath of the Second Samnite war demonstrated this. However, in the volatile ancient world, a beaten enemy one year was often victorious the next, so though Rome was surrounded by beaten enemies, next year was just around the corner.

Rome's attitude toward the fiercely independent Samnites and once regal Etruscans led to smoldering resentment across Rome's new territory. The probable source of their resentment was that Rome considered Etruria and Samnium to be newly conquered territory, ripe for settlement and colonization, while the natives saw their treaties with Rome as being between equals. Unequal terms yes, but between equals. When Rome started planting colonies in Samnium and parading the legions through Etruria, fresh talk of resistance and war began. The Samnites in particular understood that Rome was now driven by visions of a peninsula-wide empire and peace meant little more than death by population migration and displacement, rather than by the sword. They were proud of their language and culture, and saw all too well what the future held for a passive Samnite nation, a mere footnote in the Roman history books — by resisting they could at least get one more chapter into the history books.

The Samnites and Etruscans Rebel

In 298 BC, the Samnites began to resist Roman incursions into their land. Rome sent envoys to Samnium to demand that they honor the peace but the Samnites were done with the treaty and war was declared once more. Two consular armies (two legions under the command of each consul, so four legions) were sent into Samnium in 297 BC. The Samnites were unprepared for this onslaught but the army they had raised did its best to stay away from the Romans, not wanting to risk a full-scale battle they would surely lose. So the consuls, Marcus Valerius— no longer the intemperate young Master of Horse but by now an old man and widely considered the most able of the Roman generals — and Publius Decius — son of the legendary Decius who won the grass crown and sacrificed himself in battle — spent the rest of the year ransacking the countryside. Eventually, the Samnite army, still unwilling to fight in the open, left Samnium altogether and made its way to Etruria. They knew they could never defeat the Romans alone. They needed help.

The next year Appius Claudius (he of the Appian Way) was elected consul again. The people wanted to return Marcus Valerius as consul for the second year in a row, but he dodged the draft citing the mandatory decade wait before holding office again, scolding the Romans for attempting to abandon the rule of law just because they were faced with an emergency. Chastened the electorate re-voted and elected instead a plebeian named Lucius Volumnius.

With the Etruscans beginning to rebel as well, the two new consuls drew lots to determine their spheres of command. Volumnius was assigned Samnium while Claudius drew Etruria. When Volumnius arrived in Samnium he found that the Samnite army remained in semi-exile. He marched around capturing towns, raiding for plunder, generally enriching himself and his men with ease but he knew that there was no threat to Rome to be found amongst the women and children and old men of Samnium. Rome's enemies were in Etruria, he thought "What in the world am I doing here?"

At this point there is a discrepancy in the record. According to Volumnius, Claudius sent him a distressed letter confirming his fears, stating that the Etruscan and Samnite armies had joined forces and Volumnius must come to Etruria at once to help. Volumnius, seeing no danger in leaving Samnium marched his legions north to Etruria to answer Claudius's call for help.

When he arrived, however, Claudius denied having ever written such a letter. Claudius said that he was well in command of the

situation and did not need Volumnius around trying to push in on his show. It was not explicit, but the implication was that the patrician Claudius did not want the assistance of a mere plebeian. Volumnius, offended by the reaction to what he thought had been a request said, "Fine, have it your way," and wheeled his army around. However, the officers and men of Claudius's army blocked his path. Despite the vain assertions of their commander, they told Volumnius that the situation in Etruria was dire and the presence of both armies was necessary for victory. Volumnius decided to put it to a vote of the legions, who by loud acclaim demanded he stay. Claudius was nonplussed, but was wise enough not to fly in the face of resounding popular opinion and agreed to fight with Volumnius by his side. The legions then rushed out to find the mixed Etruscan and Samnite army. The resulting battle was an ill-organized and sloppy affair on both sides. The Samnite general wasn't even present, so the Samnites were completely disorganized in their deployment and the Roman legions, with their commanders at odds with one another and hasty in their search for a fight charged into the fray without much of a plan at all. Despite this, however, the Romans prevailed, scattering the Etruscans and leaving the Samnite army in disarray.

Everyone Gangs Up on Rome

However, this victory did not end the danger. The next year, 295, the Samnite army re-grouped and the Etruscan communities committed fresh troops to the struggle. In addition, the Umbrians, a hill tribe from the northern Apennines officially joined the coalition against the Romans, and, in a surprise development, Gallic tribes that had settled in the Po valley allowed their services to be bought by the wealthy Etruscans, swelling the size and strength of the army Rome would soon face. The armies of these four races gathered near Clusium in northern Etruria to plan their next move.

In Rome, consular elections were held and despite his renewed protests, Marcus Valerius was returned once again to office. This time he bowed to public pressure and agreed to serve. His only stipulation was that Publius Decius should be his colleague. The two had been partners in the consulship twice before and had served together as censors. There were obvious tactical disadvantages to having consuls at odds with each other, as Claudius and Volumnius had proven and Marcus Valerius wanted to make sure there was harmony at the top as Rome went off to challenge the largest and most dangerous enemy it had ever faced.

The people agreed with this logic, and returned Decius. However, despite their previous excellent working relationship, things immediately got off on the wrong foot. The senate wanted to assign Marcus Valerius to Etruria without the traditional drawing of lots. Decius protested, saying that he had no problem being sent to Samnium to lead the war on a quiet front, but he would not do so arbitrarily because Marcus Valerius, a patrician, was considered better suited for the greater danger that lay in Etruria. He demanded that lots be drawn and let the chips fall where they may. Marcus Valerius for his part, exacerbated the situation by accepting command in Etruria and, in fact, claiming it as his right. If it had not been for his bold decision to enter the Cimmerian Forest and securing the natives as an ally of Rome, the legions would not have the supply routes needed to enable a major campaign in Etruria in the first place. He considered Etruria to be his country and wanted to finish the job he had started. A heated exchange followed, but in the end precedent gave way to popular pressure and Marcus Valerius led his legions into Etruria without the drawing of lots.

However, after the senate began to read Marcus Valerius's reports of the massive army gathering and hearing Appius Claudius describe the desperate situation he had just left, they recalled Decius from

Samnium and asked him to join Valerius in Etruria. Every enemy of Rome was gathered in the north and the Romans had to win the upcoming battle.

Decius marched with his armies north, leaving a token force to watch over the non-combatant Samnites. Marcus Valerius was a far more practical man than Claudius and when he saw Decius approaching he welcomed him with open arms. Glory could only be had in victory and the size of the anti-Roman coalition army drastically reduced the odds of victory. Joined together, the legions would be more than a match for this formidable enemy.

The Battle of Sentinum — 295 BC

The two armies met near Sentinum and set up camp across the plain from one another. Deserters from the Gallic camp brought the consuls word of the coalition's plan. They had decided that the Gauls and Samnites would fight Rome on the battlefield, while the Etruscans and Umbrians overwhelmed the undermanned Roman camp. They hoped to catch the Romans without an exit strategy and crush them between the force of their four combined armies. But, now knowing the plan, the consuls immediately took measures to prevent its implementation. In a classic display of indirect strategy, a contingent of legionaries was ordered out into the Etruscan countryside to attack and burn at will any house, community, town or field they encountered. The Etruscan soldiers could not sit idly and watch their land devastated and broke camp to protect their homes. Having now peeled off maybe a fourth of the opposing forces and thrown a wrench in the coalition plan, the Romans immediately sought a battle, which the remaining Samnites, Umbrians and Gauls welcomed, abandoning their dual attack strategy. They were confident of victory, today would be the day they broke Rome and lifted its oppressive yolk from the back of Italy. That was the plan anyway.

The Battle of Sentinum was the largest ever fought in Italy to that date. Both sides fielded armies upwards of 40,000 men with allies and cavalry included. On the Roman side Decius commanded the left flank against the Gauls while Marcus Valerius took the right against the Samnites. Though united in purpose they took very different approaches. Valerius felt that Rome's strength lay in its discipline and endurance. That the Gauls and Samnites started strong but faded down the stretch. He took a conservative approach, holding against Samnite charges, but not pressing the advantage or taking risks. Once they tired, though, he planned on crushing them.

Decius, the junior partner, had no such patience. He wanted to meet strength with strength and pushed back with everything he had against the Gauls. The Gauls began to falter and Decius decided to win the battle early and decisively, but in his haste for glory he sealed his fate. He led a bold cavalry charge into the heart of the Gallic line, but rather than breaking them, he found his own forces scattered and killed, and when the cavalry wheeled around to escape the Gallic attack they charged headlong into the front lines of the Roman infantry, crushing under hoof many of their own men. The Roman left was in complete disarray and began to panic and flee. Decius however, recognizing his folly (and here we are moving into romantic, vivid Roman storytelling) knew what he had to do. He called a priest

and ordered that as his father had sacrificed himself to ensure victory, so too would he, to atone for his folly. He anointed himself and, wrapped in a ceremonial robe, followed his father to the underworld. Seeing their commander's sacrifice the Roman left rallied and charged the Gauls.

On the right, Marcus Valerius's plan was about to come to fruition. He saw that the spears were thrown with a little less force and the aim was not so true. He ordered his cavalry and middle line around the right and pressed the Samnite flank. When they turned, Valerius ordered his main line to charge ahead and take no prisoners. The Samnites could not long endure the duel front and finally, after a full day's fighting broke and fled. The Gauls, along with the Umbrian forces were now left pinned between two armies and, recognizing the fight was lost, followed the Samnites into the Etruscan countryside. The Romans had faced a combined army of the four strongest tribes in Italy and emerged victorious. The peninsula was now Rome's and would remain so for the next 800 years.

Rome Triumphant

The war against the Samnites would carry on for another five years, but at Sentinum the fate of Italy was sealed. A final clash between Roman and the Samnites was fought at Aquilonia in 293 BC with the Romans completely dominating an enemy that was once more than equal to Roman strength. The Samnites were beaten, finally and completely and five decades of struggle came to an end. However, though they could no longer muster the force necessary to resist Roman domination, Samnite resentment never died. Two-hundred years later, the Samnites would be at the center of the Social war, an Italian revolt against Roman discrimination. In that war, they were the first to take the field and the last to surrender. However, that story is for another day.

The Roman dream of an Italian empire was fast becoming a reality and the only thing that stood in their way were the Greek cities of Magna Graecia. The time had come for the independent city-states in the south to recognize a new master, though subduing the Greeks would be no easy task. They were as skilled at war as the Romans and had the resources of Greece to support them in their struggle and one general in particular, Pyrrhus of Epirus, a relative of Alexander the Great, to lead them. Greece was fresh from conquering half the world under Alexander and was the premier civilization of its day. This would be the first in a series of clashes between the upstart Romans and the long established Greeks that marked the transition from Greek to Roman dominance in the Mediterranean, though when Pyrrhus climbed aboard his ship to sail for Italy he was not to know it. He thought he was off to put down some barbaric rabble and maybe get rich. He had no idea what he was up against.

Chapter 17

Pyrrhic Victories

280 – 275 BC

After defeating the Etruscans in the north and the Samnites in the east, the Romans now looked to Magna Graecia for fresh conquests. All that stood between Rome and an Italian-wide empire was the fiercely independent and disunited Greek cities in the south. Despite the collective threat they faced from Rome, the rivalry between the cities of Magna Graecia precluded any organized resistance. The Romans decided all they had to do was play the cities off against each other, knowing they would have little trouble finding a few willing Greek accomplices who, in return for preferential treatment from their new Roman overlords, would aid Rome in subduing their Greek countrymen. However, Roman plans were complicated by the introduction of an army from across the Adriatic led by the Greek King Pyrrhus.

Answering calls for aid against the Romans, Pyrrhus had dreams of an Italian kingdom for himself. Though his dreams were ultimately foiled, the battles he fought against the Romans marked the opening salvo in a struggle between the Roman west and the Greek east. This struggle would end a hundred years later with the bewildered Greeks kneeling before their new Roman masters.

The Greeks and the East

Prior to the invasion by Pyrrhus, the eastern and western Mediterranean had, for the most part, been completely separate from one another. Divided roughly by the Adriatic and Ionian seas, the two halves had developed independently. Greek attention had always faced east and been consumed by its rivalry with Persia when it wasn't consumed with battling endlessly with itself. There were, of course, Greeks who had migrated west to the south of Italy and Sicily, but once their cities were founded it was as if they lived in a different world. There was no attempt from the motherland to control them and no involvement by the Italian colonies in the persistent internal Greek squabbles. The only major historical overlap was the Athenian invasion of Sicily during the Peloponnesian war in 415 BC. The expedition had ended so disastrously for the Athenians (many point to it as the principle reason Athens lost the war) that the thought of going west filled the Greeks with prudent repulsion for generations. They had enough to deal with in the east without courting disaster in the west.

When Alexander ascended to the Macedonian throne in 338 BC all of his ambition lay east with the conquest of Persia and beyond. It has long been a source of speculation as to what would have happened if Alexander turned west and faced the nascent Roman Empire rather than going east to fight the Persians. It is only 650 miles from Athens to Rome and Alexander, who marched 3000 miles to India undefeated, could have taken Italy almost as an afterthought. However, the Romans were granted a stay of execution and the greatest general in the ancient world marched his armies east, allowing Rome to continue to gather its strength unmolested.

Pyrrhus of Epirus

Forty years of war, shifting alliances and rivalries between Alexander's generals followed his death in 323 BC. By 280 things had settled down so that when a Greek commander finally did look west with ambition, it was only because of the limited opportunities for conquest in the post-Alexandrian eastern Mediterranean. That commander, Pyrrhus of Epirus was born in 318 BC, right into the middle of the post-Alexandrian power struggle. He was a prince of Epirus, a kingdom located in what is today the Balkans on the periphery of the Greek world. He was a second cousin of Alexander and found himself caught up in the volatile post-Alexandrian battles for control of Greece, Egypt and Persia. His father was dethroned when Pyrrhus was only two and the family was forced into exile. At sixteen, his father now dead, Pyrrhus was returned to the throne of Epirus by the powerful king his family had taken refuge with, but a year later he was deposed. Through marriage, Pyrrhus managed to gain powerful friends while enduring his second exile, taking a daughter of Ptolemy as his wife and marrying his sister to Demetrius, the reigning king of Macedon. With these new allies Pyrrhus regained the throne of Epirus. A few years later, his sister dead, Pyrrhus turned on his ex-brother-in-law, conquering Macedon and proclaiming himself king. His reign over Alexander's homeland was brief however and he was driven back to Epirus in 284 BC.

By this time, the situation in the east had begun to solidify. What had once been Alexander's empire was now divided into three major kingdoms: Antigonid Greece and Macedon, Seleucid Persia and Asia Minor and Ptolemaic Egypt. There was little room here for an ambitious 34-year old leader of a minor Greek kingdom.

Tarentum Calls for Help

In 282 BC, Tarentum, one of the leading cities of Magna Graecia sent envoys into Greece begging for aid against Roman encroachment. Pyrrhus leapt at the opportunity. The major powers disdained to get involved, but Pyrrhus saw a chance for glory. They may not be room for him in the east, but there was abundant space for a savvy general to acquire a rich and powerful empire in the west. Pyrrhus nobly answered the call for aid and readied his army of 25,000 to sail to the rescue of his besieged compatriots who would soon, hopefully, also be his subjects.

Tarentum had run afoul of Rome because Rome had run afoul of Tarentum. The Romans had formed an alliance with the minor city of Thurii, and when their new allies were threatened, Rome offered assistance. This annoyed the Tarentines, who considered internal Greek matters to be their domain. They were further incensed when a small Roman fleet sent to garrison Thurii was blown off course and ended up in Tarentine waters, a clear violation of a standing treaty between Rome and Tarentum. The Tarentines attacked the Roman fleet and sunk a number of the errant ships. Now it was Rome's turn to be incensed and envoys were sent to Tarentum to demand an apology. The Tarentines however, treated the envoys rudely and sent them packing to a chorus of insults. Rome needed no further provocation and in 282 BC war was immediately declared. It was at this point that Tarentum sent out its call for aid from Pyrrhus.

Before aid could arrive though, the Romans sacked Tarentum and had begun peace negotiations with its aristocratic party who favored an alliance with Rome. However, an advance party from Epirus arrived in 281 BC just as the papers were being signed and drove the Romans out. In 280 Pyrrhus arrived with his full army including 4000 cavalry and 20 war elephants. They landed in Italy without opposition and the Greek king began to lay plans for the systematic conquest of the peninsula. However, the Romans were in no mood to give up their recently won prize.

Battle of Heraclea — 280 BC

The Romans sent an army of eight legions south to deal with this invading army and met Pyrrhus near Heraclea, a Greek city located on the instep of the Italian boot. Pyrrhus was confident of victory, but began to have doubts as he watched the Romans methodically build their fortified camps. This was not the barbarian hoard the Tarentines had described. This was an organized and disciplined army of a civilized society. Mildly worried, but undeterred, Pyrrhus led his army into the field. The disciplined Greek phalanx was more than a match for the Romans and Pyrrhus's army soon gained the upper hand. However, the Romans were stubborn in defeat and the battle took its toll on the Greek army. Pyrrhus lost 4,000 of his best troops and watched with consternation as the Romans, rather than breaking and fleeing in a panic withdrew in an orderly fashion back to their camp. This was not going to be as easy as he thought.

The Battle of Heraclea was important for two reasons. Firstly, it was the first time the newly reformed manipular legions had faced the might of a full Greek phalanx. True, the legions had lost, but the fight was by no means lopsided. Secondly, it was also the first time the Romans faced war elephants. The Roman cavalry was terrified by the huge beasts and the presence of the elephants played a major role in tipping the battle in Pyrrhus's favor. The Romans would learn from their defeat and craft new ways to attack the phalanx and tactics to deal with the hitherto unknown elephant, tactics that would come into play when Hannibal deployed them time and again against the Romans in the Second Punic War.

Battle of Asculum — 279 BC

The Romans next met Pyrrhus further north at Asculum, on the east side of the Apennines. By this time Pyrrhus had reinforced himself with some new Italian allies, with some Samnite tribes being the most notable addition. However, the Greek king was disappointed by his inability to peel off more Italian allies from Rome. The Romans had done much to shore up their alliances and Pyrrhus's plan of turning the Italians *en masse* against Rome was not coming to fruition.

When the two sides met near Asculum, they fielded equal armies of about 40,000. The Romans were led by Publius Decius, son of the hero of the Third Samnite War and grandson of the hero of the First Samnite War, who brought with him new devices to deal with the war elephants, including chariots that would circle the legs of the huge beasts with rope and bring them crashing down. It was the same tactic that had served the Rebel Alliance so well against the Imperial Walkers during the Battle of Hoth.

The first day of battle ended in a stalemate. The Greek forces broke the legions they faced on the left wing, but the Romans defeated the Samnite and Tarentine forces in the center. Pyrrhus tried to press his advantage on the wing, but the beaten Romans retreated up a steep hill, too steep for the Greek phalanx to follow. Raining projectiles down on the Greeks, the Romans forced Pyrrhus to withdraw and the day ended with neither side holding the advantage.

The next day Pyrrhus ordered his men to hold the steep ground and forced the Romans into the flat open plain. This time his elephants overwhelmed the Roman line and they broke. Pyrrhus had won again, but the battle had been costly and many of his best officers had fallen. Congratulated on his triumph, Pyrrhus famously commented, "One more such victory and we are undone." Giving rise to the expression "Pyrrhic Victory" to describe a costly success.

Worn down by fighting the Romans, Pyrrhus offered terms of peace, but was rebuffed by the senate. They were persuaded by the old (and by now truly blind) Appius Claudius to refuse any treaty with a foreign army on Italian soil. At this point Pyrrhus was stuck. The Romans had just concluded a new treaty with the Carthaginians and now the two great powers of the western Mediterranean would not be turned against one another. Pyrrhus decided to move on from Italy. It had, after all, been his plan all along to use Italian bases as a springboard for the real prize — Sicily. He was allowing himself to get bogged down with preliminary and unnecessary fighting. He did not need the Italian bases, they just would have been nice. His ego-saving

rationalizations completed, Pyrrhus left Italy and sailed for Sicily in 278 BC.

To Sicily and Back

At this point Sicily was divided between the Carthaginians who held the west and the Greeks who held the east. Upon hearing the news of Pyrrhus's imminent invasion the Carthaginians laid siege to Syracuse, the most important Greek city on the island, and attempted to capture it before Pyrrhus arrived. However, they were unsuccessful and were driven off when Pyrrhus landed. The Greek king claimed Syracuse as his own and led the grateful Greeks against the Carthaginians who were pressed back until they held only a single city on the west coast. The Carthaginians offered to relinquish claims to the rest of Sicily as long as they were allowed to hold the one port but Pyrrhus, confident of final victory, refused the offer. However, unable to dislodge the Carthaginians from their stronghold he decided to attack the North African city directly. He ordered the Sicilians to raise an army and build him a fleet for the invasion, but the locals had grown tired of Pyrrhus's dictatorial style and refused. The strength of his army sapped by the campaigns in Italy and Sicily and his rear guard pressed hard by the Romans, Pyrrhus decided to return to the mainland lest he find himself trapped on the island by the Carthaginian fleet. He would consolidate his holdings in Italy and return to Sicily with a large enough army to drive out the Carthaginians once and for all.

In 275 BC he returned to Italy and immediately faced a Roman army determined to drive the Greek invader off. They faced each other near Maleventum and, once again Pyrrhus's army defeated the legions. However, this time, Roman fire arrows had sent the war elephants crashing through Pyrrhus's own line wreaking havoc and killing a good number of his infantry. By now the casualties had mounted and Pyrrhus was at his wits end. He decided that he didn't like the climate much in Italy and gathered up what was left of his army and sailed back to Epirus. Never had a general won so many battles with so little to show for it. The Romans, delighting in their non-victory victory renamed Maleventum Beneventum, changing it from the place of bad events to the place of good events.

The Conquest of Magna Graecia

Pyrrhus left behind a garrison in Tarentum, but the Romans quickly overran the outnumbered Greeks and in short order solidified their hold on Magna Graecia. The Romans now controlled the entire peninsula and had proven themselves an emerging power in pan-Mediterranean politics. The east began to wake up to the threat that was rising out of Italy. As long as the Romans were confined to the peninsula, the balance of power that had settled in the post-Alexandrian world would hold. However, if this new Roman force, which had just driven off a more than able Greek army led by a man widely considered to be the best general of his generation, decided to expand its horizons, it spelled nothing but trouble for the old powers.

The Roman capture of Magna Graecia represented not just another step in Rome's expansion, it also effectively brought to a close the era of the city-state in the ancient world. The polity that Plato and Aristotle had held as the ideal form of government was now a thing of the past. The Macedonian conquest of Greece had already ended the existence of the independent city-state there, but it had survived in the Greek colonies of Magna Graecia. However, the subjugation by Rome ended any official autonomy for the Greek city-states of Italy and henceforth politics and government in the ancient world would move permanently into the hands of large empires. The only true refuge was Syracuse, which managed to survive more or less independently until the end of the Second Punic war, but its longevity was only secured by a close personal alliance between King Hiero of Syracuse and Rome. Had Hiero been less of a friend to Rome, Syracuse would have fallen long before it did. The city-state as a political institution was effectively dead and Rome had dealt the killing stroke.

As for Pyrrhus, he never got the chance to avenge his losses in Italy and while fighting in the Greek city of Argos in 272 BC was allegedly killed by a tile thrown from a rooftop by an Argive woman. He never won the empire he sought and his main legacy lay in teaching the Romans how to effectively battle a Greek army and introducing them to war elephants. The Romans, always adapting their techniques, would apply what they learned a hundred years later when they again met the Greeks in battle. Though the next time the Greeks and Romans met in battle the tables would be turned — it would be the Greeks' turn to lose to an invading Roman army. The Roman victories were far from "Pyrrhic," however, and Greece would be conquered easily.

Chapter 18

A History of Rome Christmas

For as far back as I can remember Christmas has been celebrated on December 25. I'm sure this is true for most of you. In fact, unless one of you out there is 1700 years old I'd would wager this is true for all of you. Christmas, as we all know, is officially the birthday of Jesus Christ. However, how was it that the December 25 was chosen from all the dates on the calendar when there is no mention in the Bible as to the exact date of his birth? December 25. Pretty random. Where did that come from? I guess we'd be pretty far off topic if the Romans didn't have something to do with it, so I suppose it won't come as a surprise when I say the Romans had something to do with it. However, we have to go back a little further than the Romans even and work out a little astronomy first, to really understand the significance of the date.

For as long as there has been civilization there have been holy days, holidays and festivals. Days or weeks where work was put aside in honor of this or that god and to celebrate this or that seasonal transition. The particulars change over time and place but there are a few constants that seem to pop up over and over again, not just in Western Civilization, but everywhere. For example, some sort of holiday or festival is invariably found at the beginning of spring in celebration of the return of life from its long winter dormancy. In agricultural societies there is inevitably some sort of harvest festival, with communities feasting on the recently hauled in bounty. And of course, across time and space, back to the earliest tribes of mankind there has been some sort of mid-winter festival. And the mid-winter festival, whatever the particular rituals or traditions, is always amongst the most popular and most anticipated.

Waxing somewhat philosophic on the subject, I believe the mid-winter festival is omnipresent and omni-loved because it's in the middle of winter. It's cold and dark and there's nothing to do. It's been cold and dark for months and it will be cold and dark for months to come. Without some kind of pleasant break, people are likely to despair. So communities started gathering around fires and throwing week-long feasts, giving each other presents and decorating everything in sight, all in an effort to brighten up the dreary months. These days December is marked by an explosion of colored lights in windows, doorways and rooftops. I can't help but think this is a psychological reaction to the dull, gray colorless winter. I always saw

mid-winter festivities as an example of humans throwing a party “just because.” It’s the middle of winter, people, let’s at least have some fun. However, there was also a harsh undercurrent. In early societies that lived on the razor’s edge between survival and extinction the winter was known as a time of famine. Any excess livestock was killed off before the truly hard months set in. The meat could be saved, but there was no point in having an excess number of mouths to feed. Accompanying this slaughter, and the copious amounts of meat it produced, were the communal feasts, sort of a last blowout before the rationing set in.

But mid-winter partying for its own sake is, of course, only part of our story. Just as humans have always been finding excuses to have holidays, we have also always had a strange fixation with astronomy. I am not going to bore you with my thoughts on the root causes of that particular obsession; let’s just say that humans love staring at the sky. It did not take long for early astronomers (who, of course, doubled as the early priests and shamans) to note cyclical patterns in the movement of celestial objects and begin to attach significance to a few of the more noteworthy points in those patterns. They watched as the days grew longer and longer through the summer until there was a period when the day reached some kind of maximum length and then began to shorten. Later there was a moment when the day and night were exactly the same length, and then, as winter came the night began to last longer than the day, until it reached some sort of peak length and contracted back to a day and night of equal lengths. People began to wrap up all kinds of religious and philosophical meaning in these days, which we now call the summer solstice, the autumnal equinox, the winter solstice and the vernal equinox. They had no idea about the solar system and tilted axis and revolving spheres floating in space, but they knew something was up and wanted to get in on the action. So they started surrounding these important days with rituals, ceremonies, and you guessed it, festivals.

So now we’ll narrow our focus and zoom in on the winter solstice in particular. If humans didn’t need a reason to party in the middle of winter in the first place, it certainly didn’t bother anyone that now there was. Here the astronomer-priests were telling them that on this one particular day, the darkness that had been spreading for the last six months, bumming everyone out, had reached its maximum and now the light would be ascendant. The worst was behind them, and from here on out every day would be a little lighter and a little warmer, rather than a little darker and a little colder. If that isn’t a reason to invent distillation, I don’t know what is. So the mid-winter festivities began to occur on and around the winter solstice just as the

spring festivals began to hinge on the vernal equinox.

So by the time the Romans came along there was already a rich tradition of festivities surrounding the winter solstice. They didn't invent anything, but they did have their own holiday calendar which became the conduit through which these ancient celebrations passed into our own modern era.

A long standing Roman winter tradition, dating to the early Republic was the Saturnalia, a feast commemorating the founding of the temple of Saturn. At first the celebration took place on December 17, but as time passed Saturnalia grew to encompass a whole week, generally ending on December 23, and by the middle imperial period sometimes extending as far as our date of inquiry, December 25.

Saturnalia was the most popular of Roman holidays and came complete with large public feasts and a complete abandonment of traditional morality — always a must for really good parties. Gambling was encouraged whereas for the rest of the year it was frowned upon. And it was encouraged not just for citizens but for slaves as well who were treated for the week as real people. In fact, in many cases a sort of role-reversal game was played where the slave was treated as the master and the master the slave. Roman citizens delighted in the novelty of serving food and running errands, while the slaves enjoyed a brief moment on the couch, humorously ordering their owners about. Those crazy Romans, what will they think of next.

As for its connection to Christmas, Saturnalia was also accompanied by gift giving, the hanging of pine boughs inside the home and singing in the streets, which corresponds roughly to our caroling, though the Romans apparently did this while drunk and naked, which I am thankful to say is a tradition that died with the empire. However, for all its importance and obvious similarities to Christmas, Saturnalia was not the true reason Christmas is celebrated on December 25. That honor goes to an imported Syrian feast dedicated to the Sol Invictus or the Feast of the Unconquered Sun.

In the mid to late Imperium, the Romans began to embrace eastern sun cults and adopted many of their corresponding rituals and holidays. And when talking about worshiping sun-gods, the winter solstice is obviously going to be seen as a date of great significance. Sol Invictus honored the sun-god for holding fast against the encroaching darkness and celebrated the day he turned the tables on his eternal enemy, Night, and began to retake the sky. The Syrian-born Emperor Elagabalus introduced the Romans to the feast around 220 AD and held it every year on December 25, which was according

to the Roman calendar at the time, the date of the all important winter solstice. Fifty years later the Emperor Aurelian, whose patron god was Sol (one of the various Sun gods hanging around at the time) popularized the feast and made it an empire-wide holiday.

Twenty odd years after Aurelian, Constantine came along and I think we all know what happened next. Seized with either a mystical vision of Christ or a rather practical understanding that Christian bureaucrats were the only ones who could be trusted with the Imperial treasury, Constantine officially ended the persecution of Christians and on his deathbed converted to Christianity, having spent much of his life patronizing and strengthening the Christian Church. In the beginning of the Christian era the leaders of the church attempted to stamp out the old pagan holidays, but ran into a great deal of resistance from the citizens of Rome who continued to follow their old holiday calendar, holding fast to Sol Invictus in particular. The church elders realizing they were fighting a losing battle changed their strategy and rather than attempting to stamp out the pagan holidays simply co-opted them and refashioned them as Christian celebrations. The first official connections between Christmas and December 25 began to appear between 330 and 350 AD. Jesus was often depicted during these years with a radiating solar crown and was often used interchangeably with the various pagan solar deities by a citizen body transitioning between religions.

By 400, December 25 was firmly established as a celebration of the birth of Jesus and all mention of the old gods was gone. As the empire fell, taking the last vestiges of paganism with it, Roman Catholicism stood as the last bulwark of civilization and despite the many past claims by other deities to December 25, it was now a date for Jesus and Jesus alone. Though the importance of Christmas Day itself as a holiday has waxed and waned over the years, it was always considered the birthday of Jesus, just as it is today when, as a holiday, it now dominates the Christian holiday calendar.

So there you have it. For those of you out there who are celebrating Christmas, remember that when you sit down and exchange presents beneath a tree on December 25, even though you may not be in Rome you are doing exactly as the Romans did.

Happy Feast of the Unconquered Sun.

Chapter 19

Prelude to the First Punic War

275 – 264

Exhausted from his initial battles with the Romans, King Pyrrhus had briefly moved his army to Sicily where he attempted to establish a kingdom for himself. He found allies among the Greek colonies on the eastern half of the island but found enemies amongst the Carthaginians who had settled the western half. Pyrrhus had been successful in Sicily but was never able to completely dislodge the Carthaginians from the island. Although he had every intention of widening the war by invading Africa, a near revolt by his Sicilian Greek allies caused him instead to abandon Sicily altogether.

As he sailed away Pyrrhus made a prescient comment, the veracity of which is dubious (like every other direct quote from the ancient world). The Greek king, a veteran of the post-Alexandrian dynastic struggles of the eastern Mediterranean, knew an inevitable great power confrontation when he saw one. Sicily lay equidistant between Rome and Carthage and was too rich not to be coveted by both. So, while watching the island recede in the distance he said, “What a field we are leaving for the Romans and Carthaginians to exercise their arms.”

Ten years after sailing from Italy, Pyrrhus’s prediction was borne out and the two great powers Rome and Carthage were at war in Sicily.

The Carthaginians

To begin we should address the question of who the Carthaginians were and why we call their long struggle with Rome the “Punic Wars” and not something more intuitive, the “Carthaginian Wars” to make it easy on everyone as with the Samnite Wars and the Latin War and the Macedonian Wars, which you can tell just by looking at the name they were fought against the Samnites and the Latins and the Macedonians.

The Carthaginians came from Carthage, a city on the north coast of Africa near modern day Tunis. They were primarily an empire based on trade and by the time the Punic wars rolled around they were the leading economic power in the western Mediterranean.

Phoenician settlers founded Carthage in about 800 BC. The word “Punic” is a derivative of the Latin word for Phoenician, and is what the Romans themselves called the Carthaginians, so that’s why we learn about “Punic Wars” rather than “Carthaginian Wars.”

The Phoenicians were the strongest maritime power of their day and are remembered most for providing one of the first written alphabets in history. They spread their influence across the Mediterranean by establishing a series of autonomous colonies from modern Lebanon to the straits of Gibraltar. Any sense of political solidarity between the new cities quickly vanished, but economically they formed the backbone of a new pan-Mediterranean trade network that persists even to this day. In the western Mediterranean, Carthage soon became the richest city owing to its favorable geographic position, located along the narrow straight between Africa and Sicily. Essentially, if you wanted to go anywhere in the Mediterranean you had to sail by Carthage so it quickly became a hub of commercial activity.

Politically the Carthaginian government was a mixed oligarchy. There was a people’s assembly, but it was mostly ceremonial and was rarely called upon to make important decisions. The real power lay in the senate — a body made up of men from the richest families in Carthage. However, the real power lay with a council of the 100 richest and most distinguished senators. The senate elected Carthage’s chief executive, the Suffate, who served annually with minimal constraints on power. The only aspect of Carthaginian life the suffate did not control was, interestingly, the army, which was left to a professional corps of generals. This was a marked contrast to the Romans who elected their executives primarily to lead the legions — every other function almost an afterthought.

The other major political contrast between the Romans and Carthaginians was that the Carthaginians did not suffer the kind of class conflict that constantly plagued Rome. Access to the aristocracy, and therefore power, was based entirely on wealth. This makes sense given the primarily commercial focus of the Carthaginians. If you were poor and made yourself rich, you were invited into the senate and if you were rich and lost all your money you were kicked out. It is for this reason that the people's assembly in Carthage did not have nearly the clout its corollary in Rome did. There was no lingering discrimination against new wealth by old families, so there was no real sense of disenfranchisement by men with money who would have otherwise driven democratic reform. The way to get ahead in Carthage was to make money and nobody cared if you made it last week or ten generations back, and if you didn't have money there wasn't a whole lot you could do against the powers that be.

All of this contrasted with the political history of Rome and it left the two empires with very different world views. However, this contrast was nothing compared to their views on the role of armed forces. The Roman legions were made of Roman citizens and led by Roman citizens. Military service was obligatory in Rome and the most important contribution to civil society a citizen could make. Carthage, however, had no such tradition. Led primarily by businessmen and not warriors, the Carthaginians contracted out the work and hired mercenaries to fight their wars for them. There was a small contingent of professional Carthaginian soldiers who led the army, but the actual fighting was done by Numidian cavalry, Spanish infantry and Balearic slingers, all paid for from the great Carthaginian treasury. There are more than a few who argue that the distinction between the citizen army of Rome and the mercenary army of Carthage was the deciding factor in the wars between these two otherwise equal powers. This is probably an oversimplification, but the distinction should be kept in mind.

Historians hate to talk about inevitabilities and consider it an insult when anyone starts talking about how this or that historical event was "destined" to occur, and the Punic Wars are no different. It is easy to say in passing that the conflict between Rome and Carthage was inevitable and simply move on, but things are never that simple. There were many steps on the path to war and if either Rome or Carthage had acted differently at any one of these steps they might have indeed avoided the armed conflict they embroiled themselves in. But in the end, let's face it, a war between them was inevitable. They were two economic and political powerhouses whose territorial boundaries bordered each other. What did anyone think was going to

happen?

Sicilian Politics

When Pyrrhus was driven from Italy and the Romans finally held Italy, it was only a matter of time before Rome would clash with Carthage. The only thing missing was a catalyst, that minor event in an insignificant place that has started great power wars for millennia from the revolt in Epidamnus to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. In the case of the Punic Wars it was a situation in the small Sicilian city of Messana (present day Messina) that sealed the deal.

A group of mercenaries from Campania called the Mamertines had been hired by Agathocles, the king of Syracuse, to fight his war with the Carthaginians for control of Sicily between 315 and 305 BC. A stalemate peace had been reached by 300 that divided the island between Greek and Carthaginian interests, with Messana ceded to Carthage. When Agathocles died in 289 BC, his Italian mercenaries were left unpaid and unemployed. The mercenaries had taken a shine to Messana and decided to seize control of the city for themselves and see if anyone could stop them. Messana lay on the east coast of the island and the Carthaginian garrison was not large or easily supplied, so when the Mamertines overran the city, the Carthaginians could only watch helplessly.

The Mamertines held the city for a decade or so, living off the fat of the land but, knowing they were in a precarious situation, joined in the call for Pyrrhus to come to the island and drive the Carthaginians out once and for all in 278 BC. When the Greek king's rule began to reek of tyranny, the Mamertines joined in the subsequent call for Pyrrhus to go back whence he had come. Over the course of the next decade the major shift in Sicilian power politics was the rise of Hiero in Syracuse and his ambition to control the whole island. The rise of Hiero threatened both the Mamertines and the Carthaginians so, in 265 BC the Mamertines formally requested a Carthaginian garrison for their city to help them fight off Hiero and the request was granted. However, the Mamertines, apparently the most fickle ruling class in history, immediately regretted inviting the Carthaginians in and cast about for someone to help them drive off their new allies. There was no one in Sicily who could help them, so the Mamertines looked back to their homeland and requested aid from the greatest power of all, Rome.

Claudii vs. Fabii

The Romans were divided as to their response. There were moral as well as practical reasons to deny the request. Arguments for and against the idea were raised, with support for aid coming from the Claudii who, coincidentally, held land and power in the south, and opposition to the idea coming from the Fabii who argued Rome should expand north where they, again coincidentally, held the majority of the land and power. This self-interest did not detract from the arguments as such, it is just interesting to note who embraced what argument and why.

The Fabii were quick to point out two important facts, one moral and one practical. Morally they reminded the senate of the recent seizure of Rhegium by legionaries just a few years before. In the aftermath of the Pyrrhic Wars, a group of Roman soldiers had taken control of the Greek city, which lay in the extreme toe of Italy, and declared themselves autonomous oligarchs. The Romans had taken a dim view of this and in 270 BC retook Rhegium, marching the rebels back to Rome and beheading them. The Fabii argued that for Rome now to come to the aid of a group who so closely mirrored the group at Rhegium would make the Romans look like hypocrites. The second point, as succinct as it was practical went like this: helping the Mamertines meant fighting the Carthaginians and fighting the Carthaginians was a really bad idea.

The Claudii, however, argued that the Carthaginians were already pressing at Rome's doorstep, having taken up positions in Sicily and Sardinia and Corsica — the large islands off the Italian coast. If Rome did not do something soon to head the Carthaginians off, Rome would find its Italian empire surrounded by the more powerful Carthaginians. The time to act was now, before Carthage solidified its position. The immediate strategic importance of controlling Messina and thus the straits between Italy and Sicily was obvious, but the larger strategic importance of checking Carthaginian encroachment was just as important. Furthermore, they said, the Carthaginians were so bogged down trying to pacify Spain, they would probably not even react to a Roman foray into Sicily. On this last count they were completely mistaken, but in the end irresistible visions of an easy victory and further Roman expansion carried the day.

Rome Seizes Messina — 265 BC

The senate ordered one of the consuls for the year, Appius Claudius (yes another Appius Claudius) to raise two legions and sail for Sicily. However, Claudius, recognizing that time was of the essence, dispatched one of his cousins to immediately secure passage for a smaller force of Greek ships chartered from Tarentum. This smaller force would set out at once for Messina and, with a little luck secure the city before the Carthaginians knew what had happened. Once Messina was in Roman hands, Consul Claudius would follow with the two full legions to relieve the expeditionary force. This advanced Roman brigade landed in Sicily without a hitch and marched to the Mamertines' aid. Upon hearing the news that a Roman army was at the gates the commander of the Carthaginian garrison immediately began to make preparations for a fight, but seeing the Mamertines welcome the Romans with open arms, realized his position was untenable and quickly withdrew.

The conquest of Messina had been a bloodless affair, but the ease of victory for the Romans was almost certainly a result of Carthaginian restraint rather than any weakness of arms. The east coast of Sicily was the last outpost of Carthaginian control and there were no standing orders in place to cover a sudden Roman invasion. The prudent commanders likely decided it was best to leave the small Roman force alone and wait for instructions from home rather than spark a full-scale war by immediately counter-attacking.

The Carthaginian senate was apoplectic when they heard the news of the Roman invasion, recalled the leader of the Messina garrison and crucified him, literally, for his failure to defend the city. Carthage reacted with far more vigor than the Romans had expected and the Carthaginians immediately directed their armies to Messina with orders to nip this Roman menace in the bud. As Appius Claudius arrived in Sicily with his two legions, the Carthaginian armies reached Messina and without any premeditated forethought the First Punic War was on, whether either side really wanted it or not.

Next we will get into the guts of the First Punic War, or as it might just as easily be called the War for Sicily, as all the action took place on and around the island. There would be triumphs for both sides, but as much as the Second Punic War was defined by great generalship, the First Punic War is defined by bumbling, incompetence and missed opportunities by the leadership of both armies. The Romans would eventually win this sloppily played game, but their victory would do nothing more than guarantee that another far bloodier conflict would

be fought as soon as the two now mortal enemies caught their breath.

Chapter 20

The First Punic War

264 – 241 BC

A gang of ex-mercenaries turned brigands seized Messana to exploit its people and its natural resources for their own enrichment. Faced with the threat of falling under the domination of Hiero of Syracuse and losing their privileged status, the Mamertines turned to the Carthaginians for help. Soon finding their arrangement unsatisfactory, they invited the Romans to help them instead. The Romans, had recently recovered one of their own cities Rhegium from a similar band of adventurers whom they considered so reprehensible that they had taken them to Rome for public execution. However, in spite of this they accepted the Mamertines' invitation and occupied Messana. The temptation to acquire a foothold in Sicily and secure the straits in the face of Carthaginian unpreparedness clearly overcame all moral considerations. It was an example of blatant opportunism. Though they gravely underestimated the consequences, the Romans had the muscle and they used it.

Sir Nigel Bagnall, *The Punic Wars*

In 264 BC, Rome had dispatched one of its consuls for the year, Appius Claudius, along with two legions to Sicily, with the understanding that they were to quickly secure the city of Messana in the northeast corner of the island and then take what further territory they could. Claudius had been a vocal supporter of invading Sicily and was positively licking his lips at the thought of the riches and glory he was about to win for himself.

He managed to slip by the Carthaginian fleet stationed in the straits between Italy and Sicily and marched his two legions to Messana where he joined the small expeditionary force led by his cousin that was already holding the city for Rome. Upon his arrival Claudius immediately set about fortifying his position, knowing that despite his claims of an easy victory, the Syracusans who controlled the southeast quadrant of the island and Carthaginians who controlled the western half were not going to simply let Rome waltz onto their territory without a fight. He did not have to wait long for a reaction from the two major established powers on the island.

First Confrontation at Messana

Upon hearing the news that the Romans had landed in Sicily, Carthage immediately concluded a treaty with Hiero, the king of Syracuse and they launched a joint effort to dislodge the interlopers. Hiero marched his army north from Syracuse and the Carthaginians marched east from their stronghold on the western edge of the island. They met at Messana and made preparations to lay siege to the city.

Claudius was outnumbered by the two armies, but as he watched his opponents set up their camps, it was obvious they had not yet coordinated their armies. Seizing the initiative, Claudius marched out and attacked Hiero's force, driving them off with little difficulty. Hiero had no incentive to put up stiff resistance to the Romans. The treaty with his longtime nemesis Carthage had been nominal at best, along the lines of "Well, if you're going to fight the Romans, go ahead, I've got your back". However, he had no intention of actually leading the attack, and so, facing the brunt of the Roman offensive with the Carthaginians standing by watching, Hiero prudently withdrew. Better to let the Romans and Carthaginians duke it out than over-commit and risk losing his kingdom if the Romans emerged victorious and came looking for revenge.

The quickness of Hiero's retreat allowed Claudius to wheel his army around and attack the Carthaginians immediately. In the first major engagement between the two powers, Rome took the upper hand, and the Carthaginians were forced back; but it was an orderly, tactical retreat, not the mad chaotic dash of outright defeat.

The “Siege” of Syracuse

The victorious Romans followed up their victory by marching south toward Syracuse. Claudius knew it was essential to neutralize the powerful Greek city state, and after Hiero's poor showing outside Messana, Claudius was confident he could spook the king into a treaty, at the very least ensuring his neutrality in the confrontation that was to come against the Carthaginians.

Claudius began setting up for a siege of Hiero's city, but it is likely the entire operation was pure theater. Two legions with no naval support was not nearly enough manpower to take a city as strong as Syracuse, but Claudius hoped that Hiero would deal anyway. Though he had no real desire to fight the Romans and every reason to align himself with them against the Carthaginians, the king of Syracuse was not about to capitulate to a few thousand soldiers who may be gone by winter, never to return. So Hiero remained secure in his city, refused to negotiate, and waited for the Romans to withdraw. Knowing that the legions were vulnerable out in the open to a Carthaginian attack, Claudius satisfied himself that Hiero would not bargain and marched his two legions back to Messana where they would remain for the winter.

King Hiero the Midwife

The next year, 263 BC the Romans decided to commit themselves more fully to the Sicilian invasion. The operation of the previous year had essentially been a private campaign waged by Appius Claudius. He had raised the two legions himself and conducted the campaign without any input from the senate. However, now what had been a personal adventure authorized by the senate was about to become state policy.

Recognizing that the quick and easy road to victory in Sicily had been a mirage, the senate now made their plans with a broad, long term strategy. The first step was to eliminate Hiero as a threat. If Syracuse could not be made into an ally then at the very least it had to agree to stay out of the fight. With this in mind both consuls for the year, each in command of two legions, were sent to Sicily with instructions to march on Syracuse and force Hiero to the table. As the four legions moved south from Messina, for now the Roman home base on the island, they attacked towns allied with Syracuse. None of these minor cities were a match for the Romans and after a few were forced to capitulate under arms, the rest quickly announced their surrender. When the Romans arrived at the gates of Syracuse this time, they brought with them a much better hand than the inside-straight Claudius had bluffed with the year before. Isolated, cut off from his supply lines and facing four full legions, the ever pragmatic Hiero agreed to meet with the consuls and talk terms.

The king was delighted by what the Romans offered. He was to keep his existing kingdom intact and even granted control of a few additional cities in exchange for aiding Rome in their impending showdown with Carthage. Hiero jumped at the deal. He had long wanted the North Africans expelled from his island and the Romans stood a good chance of doing just that. Furthermore, if he helped the Romans now, he would secure the territorial integrity of his kingdom which even neutrality might cost him if Rome won without his help. There was always the possibility the Romans may renege down the road, but that was for another day. For now he pledged himself fully and completely to Rome.

In the end, the Romans did not renege on their deal and Hiero was allowed to keep his Sicilian kingdom intact. The alliance between Hiero and Rome would last for 50 years, until the old king's death in 215 BC and prove to be decisive as the Romans transitioned from an Italian to a Mediterranean power. Hiero essentially midwifed the birth of the wider Roman Empire, forever standing by Rome's side as it

fought its decades-long war against Carthage, and forever there with aid and comfort after every Roman setback. Without the support of Hiero, the Romans would never have been able to accomplish what they did and the king was rewarded with the gift of unchallenged sovereignty over his kingdom. There was a lesson implicit in the pact with Hiero that the Romans followed to great success and ignored at their peril, which is neatly captured by the aphorism: you can attract more bees with honey than vinegar. The Roman road to global empire was always smoothest when they affected a generous and honorable stance and rockiest when they acted with deceit and cruelty. They were capable of both and with Hiero they got it exactly right. However, in their attempt to win the rest of Sicily they displayed far less wisdom and protracted the conflict longer than necessary by driving cities to the Carthaginian side with acts of unnecessary brutality as was the case with the sack of Agrigentum.

The Siege of Agrigentum — 262 BC

In 262 BC, the year after securing an alliance with Hiero, the Romans were now free to prosecute their greater war with Carthage. The Carthaginians were assembling a mercenary army at Agrigentum a Greek city on the southern coast of Sicily, which was both geographically and culturally disposed to an alliance with Carthage. The Romans were intent on preventing this force from spreading out onto the island beyond their port of entry and raised an army 40,000 strong to bottle up the city. Despite persistent skirmishes, the Romans were able to build a double wall around the city, one facing in, pinning the Carthaginian army down and one facing out to prevent any relieving force from coming to Agrigentum's aid. This was a risky strategy in that the Romans were now themselves open to a siege. The Carthaginians, well aware of this vulnerability, rerouted incoming troops to a nearby port and decided to exploit the situation and besiege the besiegers.

The siege at Agrigentum was the first opportunity for the new Roman friendship with Hiero to bear fruit as the king of Syracuse spared no expense to keep the Roman army, trapped between their two walls, well supplied. The Carthaginian commander of the relieving force had every intention of simply starving the Romans out as his own troops were raw and undisciplined, but after failing to cut the Roman supply lines and recognizing that the situation inside Agrigentum was becoming desperate he decided to risk an open confrontation. He challenged the Romans to come out and fight and the challenge was accepted. The resulting battle lasted all day, but in the end, just as the Carthaginian commander had feared, the experience and discipline of the Roman soldiers proved decisive and the Carthaginians were defeated.

In the aftermath of the fighting though, that discipline broke as the Roman soldiers got caught up scavenging for spoils. The Carthaginian army trapped in Agrigentum was able to slip out of the city and it wasn't until the last Carthaginian company was leaving that the escape was noticed. The legions briefly mustered to give chase, but then realized that with the Carthaginian army gone, Agrigentum was ripe for the taking. The soldiers wheeled around and charged headlong into the city they had spent months sitting outside. In their lust for plunder all hell broke loose and no distinction was made between civilian and combatant. Women and children were slaughtered along with the men and the city was stripped of its wealth. The commanders, whether they approved of the atrocity or not, justified it after the fact by singing the familiar refrain that they

needed to “make an example” of Agrigentum to teach other Carthage-allied cities a lesson about resisting Rome. The only lesson the Carthage allied cities learned however was that the Romans were sadistic barbarians who had to be resisted at all cost. The sack of Agrigentum did nothing to dissuade future resistance and in fact did everything to promote it. A more humane victory lap may have convinced the rest of Sicily that they had nothing to fear from the ascendant Romans, but in the end the dose of Roman vinegar at Agrigentum attracted no bees.

The Romans Finally Build a Navy

After taking Agrigentum, the Romans now effectively controlled two-thirds of Sicily, but the Carthaginian strongholds on the west coast were impregnable. Their walls were almost impossible to breach and no prolonged siege would work as long as the cities could be supplied by sea. It was the same dilemma the Spartans had faced during the Peloponnesian War. The Spartan phalanx could not be beaten on land, but the Athenians dominated the sea. Neither side risked total defeat by challenging the other on their home field, but after essentially talking past each other for 30 years the Spartans finally decided to force the issue and built a navy to compete. A decisive Spartan victory at sea finally put an end to the long war.

In the First Punic War the Romans were dominant on land, but the Carthaginian controlled the sea, so with typical Roman confidence and audacity, they decided to follow Sparta's example and take the fight onto the water. While Appius Claudius was initially crossing over to Messana a Carthaginian ship had charged too aggressively and run aground on the Italian mainland. Roman engineers studied the ship and in 261 BC the senate, deciding to take the plunge into a world they knew nothing about, ordered a fleet built based on the Carthaginian design. The Romans knew nothing about shipbuilding or seamanship, but in two months they built 120 ships and raised the 30,000 troops necessary to man them, training them rowing techniques on the beach while the ships were finished. With minimal real practice at sea, the new Roman fleet sailed off to challenge Carthaginian naval supremacy. How hard could it be?

Scipio the Ass

Leading the new Roman fleet was Cornelius Scipio, the first Scipio to appear in our narrative. The forebear of two of the greatest generals in Roman history. However, he did not get the famous name off to a good start. Scipio led a squadron of seventeen ships to Messina to make sure there was no Carthaginian presence in the area. The main fleet was to follow a few days later under the capable hands of Scipio's consular colleague Gaius Duilius. However, Scipio got greedy and decided to attack a small coastal city while he waited for the rest of the fleet. The Carthaginians got wind that the Romans were trying to launch a navy and decided to come have a look for themselves, knowing it would be good for a few laughs if nothing else. They watched with amusement as Scipio foolishly led his seventeen ships into a harbor where the Carthaginians could easily trap him. Night fell and the Carthaginians did just that and when the morning came Scipio's little fleet was bottled up by a much larger Carthaginian force. As the Carthaginians advanced, the newly minted Roman sailors lost their nerve and abandoned all the ships. The seventeen ships were lost and Scipio himself was taken prisoner. The blunder earned Scipio the famous moniker *Asina*, which roughly translates as "the Ass." Scipio *Asina*, as history now remembers him, would eventually be handed over in a prisoner exchange and resume his career, but he never shook the memory of presiding over Rome's first naval battle and consequently Rome's first naval disaster.

Victory at Mylae — 260 BC

Scipio Asina's colleague, however, fared much better. The Carthaginian naval commander, confident that every victory would be so easy, headed off to find the rest of the Roman fleet. Rounding the northeast corner of Sicily, the 50 Carthaginian ships blundered into 100 Roman ships and this time the Romans held their own. The Carthaginian fleet was soon driven back and was lucky to escape without greater losses than they did. After these two skirmishes the stage was set for the first, real, full-on, naval battle of the war. The Carthaginians sent 145 ships to meet the Romans, who by now had a fleet of 130 anchored off the north coast of the island near Mylae. Carthage was intent on using their superior seamanship to devastate the Romans and put them back where they belonged — the land. The Romans however had a secret weapon. They knew they were no match for the Carthaginians in nautical skill so they devised a way of leveling the playing field and turn the battle into nothing more than an infantry battle at sea.

The standard tactic of ancient naval battles was the subtle and refined art of ramming. One ship would try to swing around and head full speed at the broadside of an enemy vessel and crash into it with their armored prow, sinking the ship or at least taking it out of the fight. The Romans lacked the skill necessary to compete on this level, so they developed a device called the "corvus" which functioned like a narrow drawbridge. Each Roman ship had a wooden column outfitted with a pulley mounted on its prow. Attached to the pulley was a narrow plank with a large metal spike protruding from its bottom. When the Romans got near enough to an enemy vessel they dropped the corvus, which crashed into the enemy deck and held the ship in place. Roman soldiers then used the corvus as a bridge, to run onto the other ship and attack the Carthaginian sailors hand-to-hand, the kind of fighting the Romans excelled at.

At Mylae the corvus was used to great effect. An initial foray of 30 Carthaginian ships were all caught up and their crews slaughtered. The rest of the Carthaginian fleet, charging on their heels, saw what was happening to the lead group, tried to peel off, but another 20 were caught anyway. Just like that, the Carthaginians had lost almost half their fleet. Having taken the Carthaginians completely by surprise with their new toy, Rome, won its first major naval battle handily. The corvus, however, was never again so effective, the Carthaginians learning quickly to avoid the trap. Once the secret weapon was no longer secret, its effectiveness disappeared.

Battle of Cape Ecnomus — 256 BC

For the next four years, the First Punic War was bogged down into a series of intermittent and indecisive battles on land and at sea. The Romans diverted forces from Sicily in an attempt to dislodge the Carthaginians from Sardinia and Corsica, which they used as bases to harass the Italian coast. No major push was made by Rome on the Carthaginian strongholds on the west coast of Sicily and the Carthaginians were content, for now, to hold what possessions they could, unable to raise a force large enough to end the now permanent Roman presence on the island.

In 256 BC however, the senate decided its muddled and incoherent strategy of having forces spread across multiple islands would leave them at war forever and initiated a much bolder strategy that would change the whole dynamic of the war — they would invade North Africa. For this mission the Romans built a massive fleet of 330 ships: 250 ships of war and 80 troop transports to ferry the standard ground infantry to Africa. Once there, the infantry would disembark, march on Carthage itself and put an end to this war once and for all. That was the plan anyway.

The Carthaginian senate was alarmed at what the Romans were obviously up to, and ordered a massive fleet of their own to intercept the invasion force before it could launch from Sicily. They waited for the Romans to load the 80 transport vessels, which had to be towed behind rowed ships of war. The Carthaginians knew they didn't necessarily have to win the battle to end the threat of invasion, they simply had to sink the helpless transport vessels. No invasion force, no invasion.

The two fleets met in the shadow of Mt. Ecnomus on the southern coast of Sicily. If the ancient sources are to be believed then the Battle of Cape Ecnomus was one of the largest naval battles in the history of the world with something like 600 ships and 200,000 sailors and soldiers taking part. The Romans set off in a well-planned triangle formation, placing the troop transports at the base of the triangle for maximum protection, but the Carthaginians managed to bait the lead ships out of formation by feigning a retreat. The lead ships of the wedge headed off in pursuit and the back line was unable to keep up. The feint successful, the Carthaginians then whipped around and locked up the advancing Romans, leaving the transports sitting ducks for another squadron of Carthaginian ships.

However, despite thoroughly outmaneuvering the Romans, the Carthaginians were unable to seal the deal and the Roman line towing

the transports were able to fend off the attack. The lead Roman ships then got the better of their opponents and were able to swing back around and relieve the beleaguered back line. At the end of the day the Roman fleet was still essentially intact. The Carthaginians had done nothing more than delay the invasion and after the Romans repaired their damaged vessels they set out again, this time without meeting any resistance at all.

The Carthaginians pulled back to their home city where they made preparations to fend off the Roman invasion. The dynamic of the war was indeed about to change as the Romans landed troops in Africa for the first but certainly not the last time.

The Invasion of North Africa

After years of inconclusive fighting on and around Sicily, the Romans decided the time had come to stop fighting the tentacles of the Carthaginian Empire and stab right at its heart. Though they were stalled by one of the largest naval battles in history, the Romans were able to regroup and set out once again no worse for wear. They had been set back a few months, which threw a small monkey wrench into their plans, but the Romans remained focused and confident that they were on their way to sack Carthage and end the war.

In charge of the operation was the senior consul for the year, Marcus Atilius Regulus. Originally, the plan in place had been to land about 50 miles southeast of Carthage, disembark the legions, set up a defensive perimeter and begin the march on the enemy city. The logic behind landing down the road from Carthage and not right on their doorstep was twofold. First, the waters immediately surrounding Carthage were patrolled by the weakened but still powerful Carthaginian navy. The Romans concluded that any resistance they faced at sea would be far stiffer than any they met on land. Secondly, the Romans had no illusions about the ease of taking a great city like Carthage. Just as they had done with Syracuse, they needed to isolate Carthage and cut off its supply lines. So, as the legions made their way to Carthage, they were supposed to convince locals along the way that Carthage was doomed and it was time to join the Romans.

Once the infantry reached Carthage, the bulk of the fleet would set up a blockade of the city, outside the reach of the Carthaginian Navy, but still standing between Carthage and its maritime supply routes. It was a good plan, but the battle of Ecnomus had set it all back a few months and by the time the Romans landed in Africa, winter was fast approaching. There was no way to provision the entire force, which included something like 75,000 rowers, so the carefully laid plan was tossed out and improvisation commenced. Most of the fleet was ordered back to Sicily, leaving Regulus in Africa with 15,000 infantry and 500 cavalry. His instructions were to hold the Roman position for the winter and do his level best to begin the process of turning Carthage's allies against them.

Regulus, though, had other plans. He wanted the glory of ending the war and decided to march on Carthage anyway, with or without naval support. He still understood the wisdom of isolating the Carthaginians though, and attacked Carthage's North African allies along the way. It was at one of these stops, about 40 miles from Carthage at the city of Adis, that the Romans met their first real

resistance from the Carthaginian army. However, afraid of meeting the Romans out on the plains the Carthaginians took to the hills, where they figured the strength of the legions would be diminished. This, however, was a disastrous strategy for two reasons. Firstly, the Romans had just spent 60 years locked in a mortal struggle with the Samnites and had learned every trick in the book when it came to hill-fighting. And secondly, the one true superiority of the Carthaginian ground forces was their cavalry, which was effectively taken out of the fight altogether. So after the Carthaginian generals carefully set themselves up to fail, all that was left to do was take the field and do just that. The Romans marched up into the hills and dislodged the Carthaginians with ease, driving them out of the area. The city of Adis then surrendered without further resistance.

Carthage Fails to Give Up

The Carthaginian senate was now beside itself. Its army had been dispatched with ease and the Romans were on the move. Adding to their despair, reports began to arrive that the fragile Carthaginian domination of the Libyans and Numidians was breaking down and revolts were flaring up. The defection of the Numidians was particularly distressing. In the whole of the Mediterranean, the Numidians were by far the best horsemen. Without the Numidian cavalry riding with them, Carthage would lose their only advantage. Cut off from their allies and without an army strong enough to oppose the legions, the only option left to Carthage seemed to be negotiation. The writing was on the wall and when the Romans finally arrived at Carthage, envoys, not an army were sent to meet them.

Regulus agreed to meet with them, and by all accounts was about to receive significant concessions from the Carthaginians and bring an end to the long war, when fate, or rather ego stepped in. Intemperate in his demands, Regulus laid terms of surrender so preposterous that the Carthaginians refused. He demanded the Carthaginians leave Sicily, Corsica and Sardinia forever, that they completely dismantle their navy, pay a huge punitive fine, and as a final humiliation, sign a treaty that would place Carthage under the sovereignty of Rome. The Carthaginian envoys were shocked. Regulus was essentially acting as if he had defeated the Carthaginians in battle and imposing terms rather than bargaining with a weak, but still unconquered city. The Carthaginians were better off rejecting the terms and praying for a miracle than giving away the farm without making the Romans even work for it. The envoys returned to Carthage and announced that they had failed to give up, which is pretty hard to do when you think about it.

Enter Xanthippus

However, all was not completely lost for the Carthaginians. They had sent out feelers across the Mediterranean looking for aid and had hit upon a good lead in Greece, specifically in the legendarily martial city of Sparta. At the same time that negotiations were under way with Regulus, word came that a Spartan general with a small, but lethal force of Greek mercenaries was on the way. The Carthaginian senate hoped that this army from the east would turn out to be the miracle they had been praying for. So as Regulus settled in and dreamed of the triumph he would receive when the Carthaginians finally came to their senses, the Greek army arrived and, though Regulus did not realize it yet, put Carthage and his triumph out of reach.

The Spartan general, Xanthippus, set to work immediately by interviewing Carthaginian soldiers present at the battle of Adis. He was shocked to hear how badly the Carthaginian generals had blundered and quickly concluded that there was nothing wrong with the Carthaginian army itself, just its leadership. He was further convinced when he was tasked by the Carthaginian senate with drilling their army into shape. As he watched, he realized there was nothing wrong with the infantry, the cavalry was magnificent and the war elephants practically indestructible. He reported to the senate that they had nothing to fear from the Romans and, as soon as spring came, advised them to challenge the legions in the open plains immediately. The senate was skeptical, but Xanthippus eventually moved them to order the attack.

When spring arrived and no treaty had been reached, Regulus began to get fidgety. When the Roman fleet returned to North Africa they were sure to bring the new consuls for the year with them. Regulus had won the battle of Ecnomus, landed in North Africa and marched to the gates of Carthage. Now with victory in his grasp, he was about to have to hand the baton to someone else at the end of the final lap and let some newbie cross the finish line and get the glory. The clock was ticking, not on Rome's chances in North Africa, but on Regulus's chance to be the center of attention at the victory party.

Xanthippus Whips Regulus

When the newly confident Carthaginian army marched out into the plains before Carthage with Xanthippus at its head, Regulus would have been wise to stall for time and wait for reinforcements from Rome. His army was not large and had just spent the winter in enemy territory but, blinded by vanity, he jumped at the chance to fight. Conventional wisdom was that the Carthaginians were no match for the legions out in the open, and Regulus had visions of dining in Carthage that very night — which indeed he did, but not in the way he imagined.

The battle was an unmitigated disaster for Rome. Xanthippus saw clearly the advantage his superior cavalry afforded him and Regulus's infantry deployment all but guaranteed Carthaginian victory before the battle even began. Xanthippus placed the war elephants at the head of his army with the cavalry on the wings. Regulus responded by deepening his lines so the elephants could not break through them completely. However, in order to do so he had to sacrifice the width of his front. He essentially flipped the rectangle that was his army so that the short end, rather than the broad side was facing the Carthaginians. When Xanthippus saw Regulus order the new deployment, he knew victory would be his. With the shortened front, the Carthaginian cavalry could easily outflank the Roman line. Regulus couldn't have played more into Xanthippus's hands if he had tried.

The battle began when Xanthippus sent in the elephants who duly caused their patented brand of havoc. While the Romans were focused on the giant beasts, he ordered out the cavalry, which routed their Roman counterparts easily. Just as the Romans were getting a handle on the elephants, the Carthaginian cavalry hit them on both sides. The Romans, now besieged on all sides, fought for their lives, surging forward in an attempt to break out of the cavalry pincer. However, waiting for them was the fresh and so far unused Carthaginian infantry. The exhausted Romans didn't stand a chance. Of the 15,000 or so who entered the battle, only 2,000 made it out alive. Of these around 500 were taken prisoner, including Regulus himself, who as I said, did indeed dine in Carthage that evening, his hands hobbled by chains.

When the Roman fleet finally arrived it was not to preside over a final victory for Rome, but rather to pick up the pitiful survivors of a devastated army. The Roman adventure in North Africa was over and it would be 50 years before they would attempt anything so audacious

again. That time though, young Scipio Africanus would lead the invasion and secure a much better result. To add insult to injury, when the Roman ships were returning from North Africa, a storm kicked up and sank the entire fleet. It is one of the worst maritime disasters in history — 100,000 men drowned. After news of the disaster reached Rome the senate took stock of the situation and realized that after 10 years of fighting they were right back at square one.

Xanthippus, clearly the best thing ever to happen to Carthage, was rewarded for his victory with public acclaim and private threats. The Carthaginian nobility did not trust the brilliant Greek tactician and it was not long before Xanthippus, fearing he would be assassinated by the jealous nobility if he remained in Carthage, left the city for good. The loss of so great a commander did nothing to help the Carthaginian war effort. It was one of the great blunders of the war that the nobility let their own paranoia take precedence over actually winning the war. Xanthippus could have done great things for them but was never given the chance.

Ignoring the Sacred Chickens

The war now returned to Sicily. The Romans, with their seemingly bottomless reserves of men and money, enlisted tens of thousands of new soldiers and sent them off to continue the fight. Just as had happened before, years of inconclusive fighting led the Romans to conclude that they had to do something drastic to end this interminable conflict. The decision was made to attack the Carthaginian stronghold of Lilybaeum on the northwest coast of the island. A victory there would end the Carthaginian presence on Sicily and the Romans prepared for the attack with all the energy and skill they could muster. They built a fleet of about 80 ships to blockade Lilybaeum's harbor and ordered the bulk of their land forces to the city with instructions to bring it to its knees.

However, despite the massive investment of time and money in siege equipment and provisions, the Carthaginians simply would not be moved. They had little trouble running the blockade, which the inexperienced Romans did a poor job of maintaining, and kept themselves well supplied. In 249 BC, after about a year of getting nowhere, new consuls arrived at Lilybaeum, one of them, Publius Claudius Pulcher bringing with him a bold plan. He gathered the military tribunes together and made his pitch. The Carthaginian fleet, which was anchored not far down the coast at Drepana, believed the Romans were set on maintaining the blockade and posed no threat. If the Romans sailed their 120 odd ships down the coast at night, they could surprise the Carthaginians and destroy their navy before they knew what hit them. Their ability to run the blockade crippled, it would be only a matter of time before Lilybaeum fell. With the eloquent certainty of a true Claudii, Pulcher won over the troops and preparations for the raid began immediately.

However, Pulcher made one huge mistake at the outset of the operation that sealed his fate and secured his place in Roman history not as a great hero, but as one of their greatest goats. Setting out for Drepana, he ordered that the auspices be taken and the sacred chickens consulted. A flock of chickens were always carried around with the army, and just before a battle, an augur would scatter feed in front of them. If the sacred chickens ate it meant victory was assured, but if they did not, the prudent commander held up his attack. Pulcher however had no time for such ridiculous piety and when the sacred chickens refused to eat, he ordered them thrown overboard, saying famously: "If they're not hungry maybe they're thirsty." He sailed off into battle, though how he expected to win without the approval of the sacred chickens is a mystery.

The debacle that followed left the Carthaginians stronger than ever. Pulcher's fleet got started late and was noticed by Carthaginian lookouts before they were within striking distance. They immediately responded by outmaneuvering and trapping Pulcher's fleet against the coast where they were smashed against the rocks. Of the 120 Roman ships that set sail, only 30 returned. The dream of taking Lilybaeum had now passed completely into fantasy. The other consul for the year attempted to re-provision the Roman troops left at Lilybaeum by sailing around the south end of the island, but lost all his ships in yet another storm. He himself managed to survive and made his way to Lilybaeum where he declared an end to the siege and withdrew. When the First Punic War finally ended eight years later, Lilybaeum remained unconquered.

A Backwater Stalemate

However, the Romans were not done yet. They withdrew their troops to Mt. Eryx, a mountain in the west-center of the island. By taking this strategic high ground, they were able to bottle up the Carthaginian land forces in their two garrisons, Lilybaeum and Drepana. The war had now come full circle. The Romans controlled the land and the Carthaginians the sea. Neither was strong enough to beat the other in their respective spheres of dominance and a new stalemate commenced.

By this time though, both sides were broke and short of manpower and facing problems elsewhere. The Gauls were stirring on Rome's northern frontier and North Africa was in revolt against Carthaginian rule. The enemies of Rome and Carthage seem to have finally noticed the two combatants were beating each other into a state of exhaustion in Sicily and set about trying to exploit the situation.

The war in Sicily became a backwater war zone for the next seven years. The Carthaginians, under the command of a new general, Hamilcar Barca, were reduced to running a guerrilla war and hoping the Romans would just quit the island out of frustration. The center of the action was Mt. Eryx, where the strongest Roman garrison was stationed and where Hamilcar directed the majority of his attacks. In 244 BC Hamilcar finally managed to drive the Romans out and hold the high ground for himself. For the next three years he would use the mountain as a base while he prosecuted his asymmetrical war against the Romans, undermanned and under-supplied by the Carthaginian senate who, after a political party shift had lost interest in the war against Rome.

The Carthaginians Abandon Sicily

Seeing Carthaginian interest at an all-time low, the Romans decided to make their final push to win the war. After failing first in North Africa and then at Lilybaeum, the Romans decided that the time for victory had finally come. They built a new fleet, starting a navy from scratch for the fourth and final time. The Carthaginian fleet had been removed from Sicily after the disappearance of Rome from the seas a few years earlier and there was nothing standing in the way of the Romans as they once again blockaded Lilybaeum and Drepana, the last two Carthaginian outposts on the island. This time the blockades worked and the garrisons were slowly starved. At this point, the Carthaginians suddenly became interested in Sicily again and launched their entire fleet to drive the Romans off, but the hastily mustered crews were this time less experienced than the Romans who had been at sea for some time. Around the northwest coast of Sicily the last battle of the war was fought, the Romans decisively routing the Carthaginian navy. The garrisons about to fall and with no way of keeping himself provisioned Hamilcar reluctantly opened negotiations with the Romans.

The final treaty, hammered out by Hamilcar and his Roman counterpart read: "There shall be peace between the Carthaginians and the Romans; subject to the approval by the Roman people, upon these conditions. The Carthaginians shall relinquish every part of Sicily. They shall not make war against Hiero; nor do anything to disturb the Syracusans, or their allies. All the Roman prisoners will be returned without ransom and a tribute of two hundred talents of silver paid within twenty years."

Returning to Carthage, Hamilcar immediately began to look elsewhere for an opportunity to make up for Carthage's loss of Sicily and set his sights on Spain. However, he did not forget the humiliation of having to abandon Mt. Eryx and as he sailed north with his eldest son, Hannibal, he made the nine-year old boy swear an oath of eternal hatred for the Romans. It was an oath Hannibal never forgot and he would dedicate his entire life to the destruction of the Romans, his family's mortal enemy.

Assessing the First Punic War

The First Punic War was over and Rome was the clear victor. However, the peace settlement did not address the larger issues still facing the two strongest empires in the Western Mediterranean. Rome had won control of Sicily and the Carthaginians had been forced to retreat, but the North Africans were undeterred in their quest for territorial expansion. The First Punic War settled the issue of who controlled Sicily, but did nothing to settle the issue of who controlled the greater Mediterranean. In that larger game, the Carthaginians felt confident they could win.

The First Punic War was marked by poor judgment on both sides, and ironically it was the victorious Romans who showed worse generalship than the defeated Carthaginians. Regulus blew an opportunity to end the war because he let his ego get in the way and the conflict dragged on ten years longer than it should have. The neophyte Roman sailors managed to lose two entire fleets to storms (storms they were warned about in advance by the way) and another to Claudius Pulcher's botched midnight raid.

If it had been anyone else each of these disasters by themselves would have been enough to shut down the war, but the Romans were able to absorb the losses and it was their deep pockets more than battlefield skill which led them to victory.

The Carthaginians, for their part found themselves succumbing as much to the reputation of the Romans as anything else. Despite the fact that Xanthippus clearly demonstrated that the Romans could be beaten on land, the Carthaginians were reluctant to invest much in their land forces. After the last of their fleet was dashed on the rocks in 248 BC, the Romans essentially ceded the water to Carthage. However, with one theater of war shut down, the Carthaginians failed to divert resources into the other theater and left Hamilcar to run a guerrilla war on a shoe-string budget rather than give him men and money to prosecute a real ground attack. The winner of the First Punic War was always going to be the side that succeeded in fighting in their non-specialty area and it was the Romans who finally raised the final navy to defeat the Carthaginians. If the Carthaginians had done the same thing, building an army rather than a navy, they may have succeeded in pushing the war weary Romans off the island. It would have been an interesting historical turn had that occurred. The war marked the first time Rome fought outside Italy and had they lost fighting overseas they might have contented themselves with merely an Italian empire. As it stood, however, Rome's first overseas

adventure had left them with a rich, new province and merely whetted their appetite for more.

In the next chapter we will cover the years between the First and Second Punic wars. Rome will be threatened by another Gallic army pressing down from the north and make their first foray east and land their first army on the far side of the Adriatic. Meanwhile, Carthage will consolidate its holdings in Spain. Both sides knew the peace could not last forever. It was only a matter of time before hostilities between the two great powers resumed. In 218 BC, the peace would finally break and Hannibal Barca would make good his oath and descend into Italy to wreak havoc not just on the Roman countryside, but on the Roman mind.

Chapter 21

Interbellum

240 – 218 BC

For both the Romans and the Carthaginians the First Punic War had been an exhausting experience. Rome emerged in a better geopolitical position, but both sides had been drained of money and manpower and were significantly weaker from the great effort they had expended over Sicily. As a consequence both sides were vulnerable to attack from opportunistic enemies.

Always Pay Your Mercenaries in Full

Carthage's major post-war problem came down to breaking one of life's cardinal rules: do not stiff mercenaries. Essentially the new party that had taken control of Carthage in the last years of the war saw the conflict with Rome as a diversion from their main objective — making money. When the war ended, the mercenaries arrived in North Africa from Sicily and patiently waited for their due payment. However, the new Carthaginian government was strapped for cash and decided a good way to save money and reduce the final bill for the war would be to drastically cut payments to their soon to be ex-employees. How they thought this wouldn't end in disaster is a mystery. When the Carthaginian paymasters arrived at the mercenary camp, the troops, who were beginning to lose their cool because they had not been paid yet, settled down. There had been a delay, but the Carthaginians were good on their word and here at last was the riches they had just spent years earning with their blood and sweat.

The Carthaginian envoys, however, launched into a speech that I can only imagine sounds eerily familiar to employees who have listened to a layoff announcement: "We want to thank everyone for their hard work...the future looks bright for Carthage...we just need to streamline our liquidity outflow to maximize our revenue streams going forward...so anyway, you're all fired... and, by the way, your severance packages have been canceled..."

The mercenaries did not take this lying down. They did not write letters to the editor railing against the injustice of the new global economy as they touched up their resumes. They grabbed their swords and said: "trying to screw us, eh? We'll see about that!" For the next three years Carthage was locked in a war with its ex-army, a very dicey proposition when the whole reason you hired the mercenaries in the first place was that you didn't have a homegrown army of your own to speak of. However, Carthage found some change in the couch cushions and hired different mercenaries to fight the aggrieved mercenaries. Carthage eventually won the fight, but the whole thing wound up costing more than if the Carthaginians had just paid up in the first place. There is a lesson in there somewhere. Something about how easy life is when you simply live up to your obligations, and how difficult it becomes when you renege on promises. That, and always pay your mercenaries in full. Plus 10%.

Rome and the Gauls

The Romans on the other hand were not dealing with internal divisions, but rather external pressures. To put it broadly there were two competing visions for the way the Roman Empire ought to grow and two families who embodied these competing visions. On the one hand were the Claudii, who as we have already seen, pushed for southern expansion and pressed for the invasion of Sicily. On the other hand were the Fabii who looked north and pressed for Roman settlement of the Po valley. At one point, the Etruscans had held this land, but by the time Veii was captured by Rome the Po Valley had been lost to migrating Gallic tribes. So, for Rome, expansion north meant stirring up a hive of Gauls. It had been 150 years since the sack of Rome, but the memory of barbarian hordes pouring through the gates was still fresh, and, indeed fear of the Gauls was a psychological demon the Romans would never fully overcome. However, for the Fabii, this was immaterial, Rome's destiny was the conquest of the world and they weren't going to let childish fears halt the inexorable advance of the Roman Empire.

Rome did not explicitly pick a fight with the Gauls, but the permanent settlements they were building in Gallic territory were obviously going to spark some sort of response. In 241 BC a single Gallic tribe rose against the Romans, but were put down with ease. A few years later, in 236 BC, a piecemeal coalition of tribes and factions began to march south, but when they actually stood on the brink of engaging the legions, internal squabbles broke up the coalition and the threat dematerialized before the Roman's grateful eyes. These minor uprisings were warning shots that the Romans did not dismiss. Rome was in the process of annexing the Gallic tribes right out of existence. Eventually the barbarians would have to fight or die. However, before the final showdown came, Roman attention was diverted from the Gallic threat in a direction it had never looked before — east.

Rome and the Illyrians

The Adriatic had stood as the unofficial dividing line between the eastern and western Mediterranean for hundreds, if not thousands of years, but the division was about to break down completely. The process of integration begun by Pyrrhus as he tried to impose the east on the west would be completed by Rome when they ultimately imposed the west on the east. Rome's first official contact with the Greek world as an equal power came around 230 BC after Illyrian piracy finally grew to be intolerable.

Ancient Illyria, what we know of today as the Balkans, represented the far western reaches of the Greek world. Greeks in Athens or Corinth viewed the Illyrians as barbarians living on the fringe of the civilized world and hardly worthy even of contempt, but then again the Greeks of Athens and Corinth viewed the Macedonians the same way, so we can fairly take their snobbery with a grain of salt. The new Kingdom of Illyria had formed around 240 BC and at its height controlled the entire eastern seaboard of the Adriatic, including the once independent kingdom of Epirus. The kingdom did not extend far inland and the Illyrians looked to the sea as their major source of wealth and power. However, the economy of this new power was not run by an association of scrupulous merchants and traders, but rather by a gang of pirates and privateers. Much like the Barbary States of the 18th century, Illyria was a recognized sovereign funded entirely by criminal activity. They were tolerated by the Greeks because the targets of the piracy were non-Greeks and the goods from the west still made their way to eastern markets, often at a reduced price, what with the low overhead outright theft provides.

The Romans, however, who were the targets of the piracy, took a very different view. This menace had to be dealt with. Little was done at first, but when the Illyrians began to boldly attack Roman port cities the dam of restraint was broken and in 228 BC Rome launched itself against the Illyrians with brutal precision.

Diplomatic Mission to Greece

At the same time as the military campaign was launched against the Illyrian cities along the Adriatic Rome also launched a diplomatic mission to Greece to explain what they were about to do. The Romans wanted to make sure the Greeks understood that the war with Illyria was limited in scope and would be over when the pirate menace was crushed. Roman troops were about to set foot in Greek territory, but there were no plans for them to remain longer than necessary and no further invasions east were planned. The Greeks took this to heart and the Romans were well received, marking the official beginning of diplomatic relations between Rome and the great cities of Greece. The Greeks still viewed the Romans as backward barbarians, but the power of Rome was acknowledged, the Corinthians even going so far as to invite Rome to take part in the Isthmian Games, which finalized the acceptance of Rome into the Greek political world as a full equal.

There was also another element to the diplomatic mission, which was secondary to the mission at hand, but would far outstrip Illyrian piracy in ultimate importance. The Macedonians had been consolidating their empire again, much to the dismay of Greece proper. The Romans, too, looked at the successors of Alexander with concern. They had their hands full with Carthage in the west and had no desire to have a newly resurgent Macedonian empire to their east. The Romans needed allies in Greece who could tie the hands of Macedon and protect the Romans' eastern flank and the Greeks needed money and equipment to pull off any sustained engagement. These mutual overtures would come to fruition during the Second Punic War when Philip V of Macedon signed a treaty with Hannibal to join in the war against Rome. Philip may have been able to tilt the scales decisively against Rome, but he never made it out of Greece as Roman allies there opened up front after front and kept Philip plugging leaks in his empire rather than marching his armies across the Italian peninsula and joining with Hannibal to form an invincible anti-Roman army. Rome was saved then by the diplomatic groundwork laid at the beginning of the Illyrian expedition.

Free to take out the pirates with Greek blessing, the Romans proceeded with deliberate strategic and tactical skill that completely outclassed the Illyrians. In less than a year the major cities of Illyria were under Roman control and the Illyrian queen was sending envoys to Rome asking for peace. The terms were harsh, Illyrian ships were banished from the Adriatic and Southern Illyria, opposite the heel of Italy was annexed and established as a Roman protectorate. The Romans had achieved a dual victory by eradicating the threat of

piracy and setting up a permanent base on the far side of the Adriatic, where they could keep an eye on the growing Macedonian threat.

The Gallic Storm

The quick end to the Illyrian campaign turned out to be a major blessing, not just for its own sake, but because the Gallic storm was brewing again and this time it would not simply break up and leave a pleasant afternoon in its wake. This time the Gauls were united and driven. In 226 BC the Gauls began to pour through the Alps, intent on sacking Rome a second time. To face the invasion, Rome mustered an unprecedented number of men. They turned out the full fighting capacity of the Italian peninsula, every Italian community committing themselves fully to what could only be considered a fight for civilization itself. Accounts have as many as 700,000 infantry and 70,000 cavalry being raised. Not all of these were first rate legionaries and many were employed merely for local protection, but still, it gives you an idea of how seriously the Italians took the threat.

Armies were divided and sent to cover key strategic points, but the Gauls were able to march more or less all the way to Clusium in southern Etruria before they met any resistance. The first battle went poorly for the Romans and their army was trapped by the Gauls, but the invaders took the opportunity to pillage the countryside rather than maintain their vigil over the Romans and the trapped legions were able to escape. This greed would wind up being the undoing of the Gallic army. When the Gauls settled into camp that night the decision was made to put the sack of Rome on hold. The chieftains recognized that their men were too laden with booty to fight effectively, and unwilling to give up their spoils, decided to march back north and deposit their gains before returning to finish the job. They chose a route up the Etruscan coastline that offered the easiest passage for the overloaded pack animals. This proved to be a horrendous mistake. The passage lay between the sea to the west and steep hills to the east and only permitted movement north or south. A Roman army picked up on the Gallic movement and came down from the north, plugging the passage. The Gauls decided to turn around and try a different route but it was too late. The Roman army they had let escape came up from the south, trapping the Gauls in the pass. The Romans were delighted at their strategic coup, but immediately filled with unease as they watched 50,000 trapped and desperate Gauls ready themselves for a fight to the death. It was a hard and bloody battle, but the Gauls eventually could not maintain both fronts and were crushed between the two Roman lines.

With the main Gallic force now destroyed the Romans turned to the other, subsidiary Gallic armies still roaming the countryside defeating them one by one. The threat posed by the invasion thus ended, the

Romans pressed their advantage and cleared the Gauls out of Italy altogether. The Italian land just south of the Alps, which had long been considered a part of Gaul was now firmly Roman territory and would remain so for the rest of the Roman Empire, another 750 years.

The years between the two Punic Wars were eventful and successful for Rome. They had opened up relations with Greece and established a cadre of allies who would play an important role in the great war with Hannibal. They had secured the safety of their trade and communication routes to the east, which would be more important than ever as the west erupted into all-out war. After the war against the Gauls, Italy was united in a way it had never been before, and it was this unity more than anything else that stymied Hannibal in his attempt to break Rome. His plan was to beat the Romans on the battlefield and then convince Rome's Italian allies to turn on the great city, but to his chagrin they refused to abandon Rome, even after Hannibal demonstrated how much better he was than the Romans time and time again. The frightening invasion of the Gauls and the Romans' ability to beat it back endeared them to their Italian allies who were in no mood to turn on the great protector of Italian civilization when Hannibal came knocking.

Chapter 22

Prelude to the Second Punic War

Rome and Carthage had spent the years after the first Punic War dealing with their own problems and paying little official attention to one another. However, the focus of the two great powers would soon turn to each other once again and lead to a confrontation, this time over Spain. This confrontation would be the spark for what is arguably the most important period in Roman history, the Second Punic War.

Entering the war, Rome was a regional power on the rise, but still recognizably the same political entity that had emerged from the devastation of the Gallic sack 170 years before. However, at the end of the war with Hannibal, a 20-year trial of immense physical and psychological endurance, Rome was transformed into an invincible juggernaut that would conquer the Mediterranean. Hannibal would prove to be Rome's most impressive enemy and after surviving the bold Carthaginian invasion of Italy, the Romans simply turned and steam-rolled the rest of the known world. The importance of the Second Punic War is also measured by the fact that after Scipio's final victory at Zama in 202 BC, Roman elites almost immediately began to lament the loss of Roman virtue and nobility. The total domination Rome had achieved after defeating Carthage allowed steadfast frugality to be usurped by excessive debauchery. Never again would the *literati* look at their contemporaries with anything but contempt and the idea that Rome had fallen from grace was, from that point on, simply taken for granted. It speaks volumes then of the impact the Second Punic War had on the Romans that it would mark the close of an alleged Golden Age where all men were clones of Cincinnatus and usher in a modern era where all men were corrupt hedonists unworthy of their great ancestors. For now, though, Rome was still a paradigm of virtue.

The Barcas Move to Spain

While the Romans were focused elsewhere, dealing with the Gallic invasion and Illyrian piracy, the Carthaginians began to quietly build an empire in Spain. Well, not the Carthaginians as a whole necessarily, just Hamilcar Barca.

After being driven from Sicily, Hamilcar returned to Carthage and briefly stewed in his juices before hatching a plan to revenge himself on the Romans. He knew that a direct assault on Rome would be a suicidal fool's errand, so he looked instead to Spain for an opportunity to build up the wealth and power necessary to re-engage the Romans. He pitched the Carthaginian senate on the idea of a Spanish invasion, couching the benefits of such an adventure in economic terms: the opportunity for traders to make up for the loss of Sicily and the possibility of drawing from Spanish resources to pay the war indemnity owed to the Romans. The senate was quick to approve Hamilcar's plan, as much to get the disgruntled soldier out of Carthage as anything else. The party in power had been the ones who had left Hamilcar twisting in the wind for so many years in Sicily and were understandably anxious to get rid of the charismatic general.

So in 237 BC, without a navy to speak of, Hamilcar marched his army west across North Africa and crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain. The Iberian Peninsula was at that time populated with tribes whose prowess on the battlefield was matched only by their lack of political sophistication. There were three broad tribal groups, the Iberians, the Celts, and the Celtiberians who were a comingled mix of the other two races.

To say Spain was decentralized would be an understatement. Not only were the tribes constantly at each others' throats, but within tribes neighboring settlements formed intense rivalries. When Hamilcar embarked on his conquest, his task was made immeasurably easier by the total lack of cooperation amongst the natives and the willingness of locals to join the Carthaginians if it meant getting the better of their neighbors.

Hamilcar set up a base just over the strait from Africa in southern Spain and began steadily to extend Carthaginian influence over the peninsula. Hamilcar, though, was not interested in simply conquering Spain for the greater glory of Carthage; he intended to set up an autonomous empire for himself. His dispatches home did not reflect

this ambition but he clearly took steps to make the Barca family the preeminent rulers of the peninsula, not the Carthaginian government per se. Hamilcar began to mint coins that associated himself and his son Hannibal with the local patron gods and asked the army to swear allegiance to his family rather than the Carthaginian empire. Hamilcar was laying the groundwork for a quasi-divine dynasty in Spain that he hoped to pass on to his sons.

The Carthaginian senate for its part, left Hamilcar to his own devices. They were happy to be rid of the ambitious general and as long as the cash kept rolling in, they didn't care whom a bunch of backwards tribesmen worshipped. And the cash came rolling in. Spain was an incredibly resource rich territory and produced large quantities of high-grade silver. There is no doubt that the silver mines were the prime attraction for both Hamilcar and, later, the Romans. It is an interesting historical parallel to note the similarity between the Carthaginian and Roman exploitation of Spain and Spain's own exploitation of the New World 1700 years later. Both had the effect of flooding the markets of the world with vast amounts of new wealth and it is intriguing to think of Spain as being the "New World" of the old world.

Hamilcar marched his armies north and east, taking possession of whatever territory he entered and soon commanded a large portion of southwest Spain. In general, he treated the native armies who resisted with a combination of ruthlessness and leniency. The leadership would be executed, but the troops themselves would be sent home. Hamilcar was not looking to exterminate the Spanish, but to rule them. His long term plans centered on drawing from the vast pool of Spanish infantry (if they could be called that) to fill his army when he finally launched himself at Rome. There was no point in engendering the hatred of men he hoped someday to lead, so soldiers were sent back to their families. Rival centers of power, however, could not be tolerated and chieftains were executed without hesitation.

The Romans Get Worried

In 231 BC, Rome began to take notice of what Hamilcar was up to and sent envoys to investigate. The Romans were caught fighting the Gauls and the Illyrians and had no real desire to invest themselves in Spain as well, so they were satisfied by the slick and plausible message Hamilcar sent back to Rome: "I am merely trying to pay back our debt to you as quickly as possible. Surely there is nothing wrong with that." Slick. Very slick. The Romans thus hoodwinked, Hamilcar went back to gathering the strength he needed to destroy them.

The great Carthaginian general, however, would never get the chance to see Rome burn. During the winter of 228 BC, after being surprised and driven off by a tribal army, Hamilcar drowned crossing a river. He was succeeded by his son-in-law Hasdrubal who immediately raised a force of 50,000 and exterminated the tribe whom he blamed for Hamilcar's death. After this initial show of force, Hasdrubal settled back into the role of governor rather than conqueror. He did not try and build on the territory Hamilcar had won, rather he consolidated Carthaginian holdings and attempted to sink the new imperial dynasty into the Spanish psyche. He made the tribal chiefs acclaim him their supreme ruler and murdered any who were suspected of opposing him. He founded a capital on the southern coast of the peninsula called New Carthage, a virtually impregnable fortress from which he ruled. Clearly, the Carthaginians were here to stay.

In 226 BC, the Romans began to worry again about the Carthaginian presence in Spain. They had allies on the peninsula themselves and worried about North African encroachment. A treaty was concluded with Hasdrubal to the effect that the Carthaginians would not cross the river Ebro, which lies midway up the Mediterranean coast of Spain. This demarcation is important because it left Saguntum, a city that was on friendly terms with Rome 100 miles behind enemy lines. However, the expediency of preserving the peace with Carthage took precedence and the Romans agreed to stay on their side of the Ebro.

The Rise of Hannibal

Five years later, Hasdrubal's heavy-handed rule caught up with him and he was assassinated by a disgruntled tribesman in revenge for the murder of a chieftain. On Hasdrubal's death the army immediately called for the ascension of Hannibal, Hamilcar's eldest son. Only 25 at the time, Hannibal was elevated to a position of supreme authority and did not waste any time plotting how to make good on the oath he had sworn years before to make himself an enemy of Rome for eternity.

Hannibal was wildly popular amongst his troops. Not only had he been fully integrated in the semi-divine cult his father had created, but Hannibal had also grown up in army camps and was considered by the soldiers to be one of them. It was the perfect combination to assure complete loyalty. Not only did they respect him as a soldier and a man, but they worshipped him as a god. This loyalty would be tested over and over again, and it is one of the great testaments to Hannibal's leadership that in all the years he kept his men in Italy fighting an increasingly hopeless war of attrition there is not a single mention of a mutiny or assassination attempt. Not even Alexander the Great achieved that.

The son of Hamilcar picked up where his father left off and began to claim new territory for Carthage, securing the northwest frontier with a surprising efficiency that foreshadowed things to come. Hannibal was no passive governor like his brother-in-law, he was a conqueror of the first order.

The Siege of Saguntum — 218 BC

The city of Saguntum became increasingly worried by the young Carthaginian leader. They had been left alone by Hasdrubal, but Hannibal seemed to be cut from an entirely different cloth. They sent pleas for aid over and over again to Rome, but Roman eyes were turned east to Illyria. Finally, Saguntum kicked up enough of a fuss that the Romans sent a mission to Spain to get a look at the new Carthaginian leader and take stock of the situation for themselves. The Roman envoys did not like what they saw one bit and came away convinced that war with the Carthaginians was imminent, though they believed any campaign would be limited to Spain. This allowed for a certain Roman laxness when it came to preparations. They would raise some legions and send them to man the Ebro. Some skirmishes would ensue, but Hannibal would not be so silly as to cross the river, he was just testing the limits of Roman tolerance.

But then Hannibal laid siege to Saguntum and the Roman hand was forced further. Conflicts within the Roman senate created a mixed Roman response that all but ensured a full scale war. Despite the treaty they had signed restricting the legions to the far side of the Ebro, Rome appreciated its alliance with Saguntum and did not want to see it fall to the Carthaginians. So rather than following the treaty to its logical conclusion and sacrificing Saguntum for the greater peace, the Romans sent envoys to Carthage demanding an end to the siege. The Carthaginians replied that they were well within their rights to act in whatever way they wished in their own territory. There were factions in the Carthaginian senate who did not appreciate the position Hannibal was putting them in, but a treaty was a treaty and the Romans had no legal claim to Saguntum, so what were they doing making demands and issuing threats? The Romans were sent away and the western Mediterranean stood on the brink of war. All that was left to be done were the official declarations.

Saguntum fell after an eight-month siege and Hannibal sacked the city. The Romans responded by raising a three pronged force to deal with the now palpable Carthaginian threat. The main force would be sent to Africa to inflict as much damage there as possible, another would be sent to Spain to deal with Hannibal and teach the young upstart a lesson. A third was placed in the Po valley to deal with any possible invasion the Gauls might attempt. Of the three, the army in the Po Valley was considered merely a rear guard defensive force who would possibly, but not likely, see action. The war, in Roman eyes was clearly going to be fought in Spain, just as the First Punic War had been fought in Sicily. Hannibal however had other plans.

Chapter 23

The War with Hannibal

218-202 BC

Rome had laid its ultimatum at the feet of the Carthaginian senate after Hannibal laid siege to Saguntum. If the Carthaginians did not immediately recall Hannibal from the field and cease their aggressive operations in Spain, Rome would declare war. The Carthaginians declined to do as the Romans asked and both sides immediately began preparing for battle.

The Roman consuls for the year, Cornelius Scipio, father of the famous Scipio Africanus, and Sempronius Longus began to raise legions with the intention of simultaneously attacking both Spain and North Africa. However, in Spain, Hannibal was making preparations of his own that would throw the Roman war plan into complete disarray. He formulated an audacious strategy to break the Romans by way of a direct invasion of Italy. The Romans were worried about Gallic opportunism on their northern border, but did not anticipate a fully-fledged Carthaginian invasion.

Hannibal Marches Out of Spain

Hannibal amassed a force of 90,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry and 67 war elephants at New Carthage and in April 218 BC set out on a campaign that was to ultimately last for 17 years. His first task was simply to make it out of Spain. The Carthaginians only controlled about half of the country and the march to the Pyrenees was a difficult one. Hannibal had no time for prolonged sieges and was forced to directly assault the cities he passed, suffering heavy casualties as a result. Before passing into modern day France, Hannibal released the less reliable elements of his Spanish infantry and passed into Gaul with a force of about 50,000.

In Rome, Hannibal's movements passed unnoticed. Sempronius Longus was in Sicily preparing a fleet for the invasion of Africa and Scipio was in north Italy raising a fleet for his attack on Spain. Neither suspecting that in a matter of months both would be fighting for their lives in the icy sleet of the Po Valley. Scipio set out for Spain with two legions and after five days at sea put into port at Massilia on the eastern banks of the Rhone River. As soon as he put in, he received word that not only had Hannibal broken out of Spain, but that he had already reached the Rhone himself and was just a few miles away.

Scipio was shocked by this development and immediately sent a cavalry unit to investigate. Sure enough, they found Hannibal on the west bank of the river. A light skirmish of no consequence ensued and served only to alert Hannibal that the Romans were now officially on to him. He moved with all haste to cross the 1000 yard wide river, and was not helped by an army of angry Gauls on the opposite shore who were not inclined to allow this foreign army into their territory. However, Hannibal flashing the first signs of his tactical brilliance lured the Gauls into a trap and broke them apart with little difficulty. The way clear, he quickly crossed the remainder of his army and marched on toward the Alps, which stood between him and Italy.

When Scipio arrived with his legions the fires of the Carthaginian camp were still smoldering, but the army was gone. The consul decided against a pursuit, which would have taken his two legions into unknown and unfriendly territory to catch a much larger Carthaginian army. The odds were against Scipio so he made the decision to send the legions on to their initial objective in Spain while he himself returned to Italy to brace the northern border for

Hannibal's invasion. The Roman plan to fight the war in Spain and Africa would move forward, but Scipio knew that the war was about to reach an early decisive moment and wanted to be on hand to ensure a favorable outcome.

Hannibal Crosses the Alps

Hannibal's passage through the Alps is one of the most famous events in world history and with good reason. Not only did the 15 day crossing come as the snow was beginning to set in, making traversing the peaks difficult, but Hannibal's army was forced to constantly fend off bands of hostile natives. The task would be hard enough in a small self-contained party but Hannibal had to oversee 50,000 men and a supply train of pack animals, and he had 67 elephants in tow. The logistical nightmares alone were enough to dissuade even the most daring of generals from even contemplating the attempt and that is why the Romans were incredulous when reports began to arrive that a Carthaginian army would shortly be emerging from the mountains. Hannibal fought one major battle against hostile Gauls near the summit and on the descent was forced to literally carve a path out of the rocks to accommodate the pack animals and elephants. His men spent nights simply huddled around each other on the ground trying not to drop dead from exhaustion or freeze to death. Supplies were low and hunger was high. However, through it all the personal magnetism of Hannibal kept the army together. For the most part anyway.

The army that emerged on the far side had been considerably reduced in numbers. Entering with 50,000 they came out the other side with about 25,000. A considerable chunk of those lost were casualties of the environment and is a testament to how difficult the journey was, but the majority were almost certainly deserters. Apparently, the force of Hannibal's personality was only so strong.

Hannibal was able to briefly rest his troops but the two Roman legions, ostensibly in place to ward off the Gauls, were on their way with Scipio at their head. While the Romans had pressed for the war and were chomping at the bit to take on the Carthaginians, it began as a series of shocking defeats for Rome.

The Battle of Ticinus — November 218 BC

The first battle was fought on the banks of the Ticinus, the largest tributary of the Po River. Scipio, eager to engage the invading Carthaginians, built a bridge across the river and crossed to meet Hannibal. In the battle that ensued, the Roman infantry was equal to the task but their cavalry was woefully inadequate in the face of their far superior Numidian counterparts. The Romans were outflanked and driven back to the bridge they had built. In the withdrawal, Scipio himself was wounded and was saved either by a slave girl, or as Livy recounts, his eighteen-year-old son Scipio Africanus. Whether the younger Scipio saved his father is debatable, but there is no doubt that he was present at the battle that opened the war he would ultimately win sixteen years later. The Romans crossed back over the bridge and burned it to prevent the Carthaginians from pursuing. Scipio's goal had been to stop the invasion right then and there but all he accomplished was demonstrating to the local Gauls that Hannibal was for real and caused them to begin actively supporting the Carthaginian general.

Scipio returned to his base on the far side of the Trebia River, which ran from north to south, and requested reinforcements. Hannibal did not immediately press his advantage, but instead used the breathing space he had won for himself to re-provision, rest his exhausted troops and accept Gallic reinforcements into his ranks. Sempronius Longus, who was still preparing his invasion of Carthage was summoned and ordered to take his army north to engage Hannibal. It would be more than a decade before the Romans revisited the idea of invading Africa.

The Battle of the Trebia — December 218 BC

The next month Longus arrived with his army and combined it with the existing troops. Scipio cautioned against rushing out into battle, having seen first-hand what a devastating force Hannibal was in the field. However, Longus, impatient and no doubt suspecting that his colleague's injuries were behind his wariness for further battle, ordered the legions to find and destroy the Carthaginians. It was now December and the weather had turned from bad to worse. Wind, sleet, snow and rain combined to create the worst weather imaginable. The kind of weather that makes you want not even to check the mail, let alone fight a war. However, Sempronius Longus was determined to end the invasion before the next consular elections and just as in the case of Regulus in the First Punic War, the pressing need for battle was driven more by personal vanity than careful calculation. The need to eliminate the possibility of tyranny was of great importance, but time and again the annual nature of Roman elections was a hindrance to their prosecution of long-term engagements. Consuls often tried to do too much in the year they were allotted and their overreach proved to do far more harm than good. Added to that list was the disaster at the Trebia.

Hannibal played the Romans like fiddle and he manipulated Longus into a battle in which the legions were in the worst possible position. Catching wind of the change in leadership and the impatience of the newly arrived consul, Hannibal baited the Romans into a trap. Early in the morning of a particularly horrible day, Hannibal sent out a large contingent of his cavalry to attack the Roman camp. As soon as they appeared, Longus ordered his full infantry force out in pursuit. This hasty decision left the Romans without something Hannibal had hoped to deny them, a good warm breakfast. The Romans essentially rolled out of bed and charged off to fight. Compounding their hunger Longus ordered them immediately to cross the Trebia, which in December is a swollen and freezing river. When they reached the other side, they found Hannibal waiting for them at the head of a well-fed, dry army. Furthermore, Hannibal had hidden 1000 cavalry behind an outcrop of rocks and brush. The Carthaginians drew the soaking and exhausted Romans away from the river and as soon as there was enough space, Hannibal ordered the hidden troops onto the Roman rear. The battle was an unmitigated disaster for Rome. The only thing that allowed them to even salvage their dignity was the unquestioned superiority of the legions as an infantry force. About 10,000 managed to break through the Carthaginian line and make for Placentia, but the rest of the army was destroyed, either caught between the two Carthaginian lines or killed trying to re-cross the

Trebia. Sempronius Longus escaped with his life, but left his reputation lying dead on the battlefield.

Rome was now in a complete panic. According to the frantic rumors, the Carthaginians would come pouring into the city in a matter of days and nothing could stop them. However, the winter, despite Hannibal's cunning use of the weather to his advantage, was no time to launch a siege of Rome. Besides, launching an attack on Rome was not what Hannibal had in mind anyway. The Carthaginian army settled in for the winter and the war was put on hold until the following spring.

The Battle of Lake Trasimene — 217 BC

When spring arrived, the Romans raised fresh legions and set them out to man the frontier and prevent Hannibal from coming further south. The dominant consul for the year was Gaius Flaminius a popular, plebeian leader whose only major flaw was a maverick streak that did not endear him to leading aristocrats, or by some accounts, to the gods of Rome. When Flaminius was elected in 217, he did not return to Rome to oversee the religious ceremonies that accompanied the transfer of power, which speaks either to a noble disdain for the trappings of power or a foolish irreverence that would lose him the favor of the gods.

Whether it was bad luck, stupidity or the active intervention of displeased gods, Flaminius was about to lead the legions to their greatest defeat, A defeat that shook the Romans to their very core and would leave them almost petrified with fear. Luckily for Flaminius's legacy the Battle of Lake Trasimene would stand as the worst defeat in Roman history for only a year, and Flaminius's failure would be overshadowed by Varro's much greater display of incompetence at Cannae.

Sticking to his strategy of picking the most difficult routes of approach in order to surprise his enemy Hannibal began 217 BC by marching south through a swamp. The Romans had the roads covered so Hannibal simply abandoned them. The four-day march through the flooded slog was a miserable experience and in many ways was more difficult than the passage through the Alps. There was literally no dry ground anywhere and sleeping was a matter of sitting in muddy water and trying not to drown. Hannibal brought up the rear riding an elephant and making sure that the army understood the only way to move was forward. The general shared the pain of his men, though, his eyes having succumbed to an infection that would eventually lead to the removal of one of them.

However, because of the swamp march, Hannibal accomplished his goal and successfully outmaneuvered the Romans. He was now deep in Etruria and no army stood between him and Rome. Flaminius had no doubt that Hannibal's goal was to march uncontested on Rome and immediately set out at double time to catch the Carthaginians. Hannibal, had no intention of attacking Rome, but he did have every intention of luring Flaminius into a trap and he chose Lake Trasimene as the perfect site.

Lake Trasimene is about 150 miles north of Rome and its northern bank is adjacent to steep hills. Hannibal placed his infantry on the

thin strip of land between the banks and the hills and waited for Flaminius to come charging in the narrow entrance to the north bank. In the hills above and around the lake Hannibal hid his cavalry and a good portion of his ground troops.

When Flaminius arrived, he passed through the narrow entrance without a second thought, intent only on engaging Hannibal in battle. However, as soon as his forces were through, the Carthaginian cavalry appeared and sealed the entrance, trapping the legions. Flaminius was caught completely by surprise and was just wrapping his head around the fact he was now fighting on two fronts when the rest of the hidden Carthaginian troops came pouring down the slopes from above. The Romans didn't stand a chance. Of the 40,000 Romans that entered, it is estimated that 30,000 were killed (many drowning as they attempted to escape the slaughter by swimming) or captured including the ill-fated Gaius Flaminius.

Hannibal as he stood over the dead must have wondered how the Romans ever conquered anything. Sure they were strong, but from what Hannibal had seen over the last year, they were about as clever as a rock. The way to beat the Romans, clearly, was not to out-fight them, but to out-think them. Hannibal now held Italy in the palm of his hand, but his *coup de grâce* was yet to come.

Fabius the Delayer

Following the disaster at Lake Trasimene (217 BC), Rome was frightened at what the future had in store for them. Every army they threw at Hannibal met with total destruction and their once unshakable sense of invincibility had now been thoroughly shaken. It would only be a matter of days, it seemed, before the Carthaginian army would march on Rome and conquer the once mighty city. Optimism was in short supply and lamentation flooded the market.

In this depressed state, the Romans turned to an old psychological defense mechanism one last time to see them through the dark days ahead — the dictatorship. Unused since the First Punic War and avoided in general since the heady days of the Samnite Wars, when a dictator seemed to be appointed every other year, the people of Rome turned their fates over, once again to a single man. This time the reins were handed to Quintus Fabius Maximus, the well-respected head of the well-respected Fabii. There would be one or two more temporary dictatorial appointments in the years to come, but the reign of Fabius Maximus would mark the effective end of the office of dictator. It was through no fault of his own, however, rather the office was rendered impotent by the people of Rome and fell into disuse. However, it was Fabius who kick started the demise of the dictatorship by ignoring the will of the people and acting like a dictator.

Fabius Maximus had a plan. It was not a popular plan. It was not a plan to win the war. It was not a plan to bring everlasting glory to Rome. It was not even a plan that would bring everlasting glory to Fabius himself. It was a plan, however, that would ensure the survival of Rome. Fabius knew exactly what he was doing and in the face of near unanimous opposition pursued his plan unswervingly and because of his plan the Roman empire was not destroyed in 217 BC as it very well could have been. The plan earned Fabius a place in the annals of military history by affixing his name to a certain kind strategy, known forever after as Fabian tactics or the fine art of avoiding battle.

Fabius had watched with horror as the consuls of the previous few years had been goaded into pitched battles at the time and place of Hannibal's choosing. The Carthaginian general had shown a singular ability to exploit the aggressive nature of the Romans to his own advantage. Fabius was determined not to make the same mistake. If he was going to fight Hannibal at all, he was not going to let the Carthaginian dictate the terms. However, Hannibal was too clever to be drawn into a battle he had not carefully orchestrated, so the upshot

of Fabius's plan was that the two armies studiously avoided one another. However, unfortunately for Fabius, studiously avoiding conflict was anathema to the Roman character. It was if, in an effort to rejuvenate the Catholic Church, the College of Cardinals had elected an avowed atheist. The two just don't mesh well. Whatever the merits of Fabius's plan, the outcry against him was immediately deafening and many began to look to Fabius's Master of Horse, Marcus Minucius Rufus, for deliverance from what they saw as intentional cowardliness.

Hannibal was laying waste to the countryside and here Fabius was sitting on his hands and letting it go on. The only person who seemed to respect what Fabius was doing was Hannibal himself. When Fabius was dispatched against him, the Carthaginian general had attempted to set up the legions for defeat as he had done so easily before, but Fabius never bit at the traps. This left Hannibal in the driver's seat, and he pillaged with impunity, but it also left him without the opportunity to execute a killing stroke on the Romans. He was causing a lot of havoc, but no matter how hard he tried to bait Fabius, the legions remained just out of reach and intact. The average Roman may not have fully understood what Fabius was doing, but the psychological benefit of simply keeping an army in the field was enormous. Days and months passed without the news that another Roman army had been destroyed. Whether they appreciated it or not, Fabius was rebuilding Rome's confidence.

The chorus against Fabius only grew louder as Hannibal, cunning as he was in politics as well as war, ordered lands owned by Fabius spared in the general pillaging, immediately leading to suspicions that Fabius had made a secret deal with Hannibal. However, there was no deal and Fabius, now and forever after nicknamed Fabius the Delayer, was simply biding his time until the right set of circumstances presented themselves. When Hannibal marched his forces into Campania, Fabius saw his chance. It was only the genius of Hannibal, combined with a little luck that saved the Carthaginian army from a decisive defeat by the Fabian legions.

Torchlit Oxen

Without going too much into geography, the large valley of Campania had eight passes, big enough allow an army the size of Hannibal's to march through. Five of them were either held solidly by the Romans or lay behind an unfordable Volturnus River, leaving three possible exits for Hannibal from Campania. He had gone into the valley as a part of his strategy to peel off Rome's major allies. The great city of Capua had risen to be the second strongest city in Italy behind Rome and Hannibal believed there was a good chance he could turn Capua from Rome. He would eventually succeed in his mission, though the Capuan revolt would not prove as decisive to the war effort as he had hoped when it finally occurred. The Carthaginian army, having entered Campania proceeded with their standard *modus operandi* of terrorizing the countryside, but before they knew it Fabius had moved the legions into each of the three escape routes, trapping them in the valley. Hannibal knew he had been outmaneuvered and desperately sought a way of extracting himself and his troops.

One night a few hours before dawn, Roman sentries spotted a mass procession of torches and immediately raised the alarm. Hannibal was attempting to break through one of the passes under cover of dark. The Roman troops rushed out, determined to prevent Hannibal from escaping. However, in so doing they left the pass wide open and when they reached the alleged column of troops they found only oxen who had lit torches tied to their horns. Hannibal led his army through the unguarded pass and the Carthaginians got away.

Co-Dictators

After this setback, Fabius was recalled to Rome to account for himself. The tribunes hurled every insult in the book at the dictator and convinced the people to support an unprecedented measure: the elevation of Minucius to co-dictator. This extra-legal solution was the death knell of the dictatorship as an effective office. The whole idea behind the dictatorship is that one man should have the final say over all policy without right of appeal. By elevating a co-dictator the entire premise of the office was lost for good. If a dictator could be so easily rebuked by the people, then what good was having one? The semi-magical spell of dictatorial infallibility had been broken for good and not until the time of Sulla 200 years later would the concept of dictator reappear with any real meaning.

Minucius took command of half the army and marched toward Hannibal with typical Roman aggression. But, like all his predecessors, Minucius was outmaneuvered by Hannibal and the legions under his command were almost wiped out. However, the much derided Fabius, who watched from the nearby hills, decided he could not allow Minucius's forces to be destroyed and against his better judgment ordered his troops to the rescue of his beleaguered colleague. The addition of Fabius's troops turned the tide and Hannibal was forced to withdraw. Minucius, humbled by his experience immediately placed himself back in a subordinate position to Fabius. The rest of 217 BC passed without another major battle. Fabius despite persistent calls for his head had managed to lead Rome through an entire year without a major defeat.

Rome, however, would not learn from Fabius's success and clamored for leaders who would take the fight to Hannibal. In 216 BC they got what they asked for, and for their trouble, got everything Fabius predicted: a defeat so massive it nearly ended the Roman Empire right then and there.

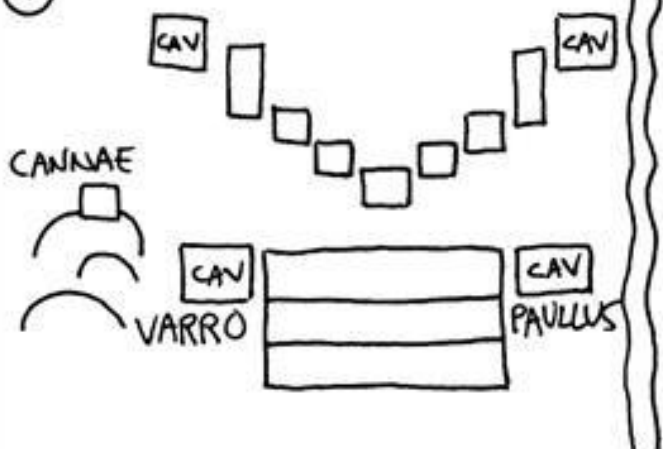
The Battle of Cannae — 216 BC

The dominant figure to emerge during Fabius's dictatorship was a man named Marcus Varro, who denounced at every opportunity the cowardly policies of the wealthy patrician dictator. He promised the people that if they elected him consul he would raise the largest army Rome had ever seen and crush Hannibal once and for all. The people responded by overwhelmingly supporting Varro for the consulship. His colleague for the year was the respected patrician Lucius Aemilius Paullus, who would play the super-ego to Varro's id. Together they raised 16 legions of Romans and allies and marched southeast from Rome to find and destroy Hannibal.

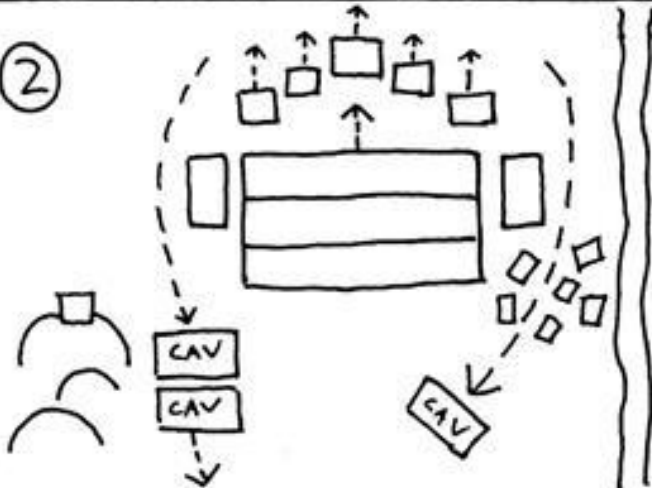
The Carthaginian army had taken over the small but important town of Cannae and the Roman force of 80,000 marched straight against Hannibal's smaller force of just 40,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry.

When the Romans arrived, a disagreement arose between the two consuls. Paullus did not like the look of the flat, open

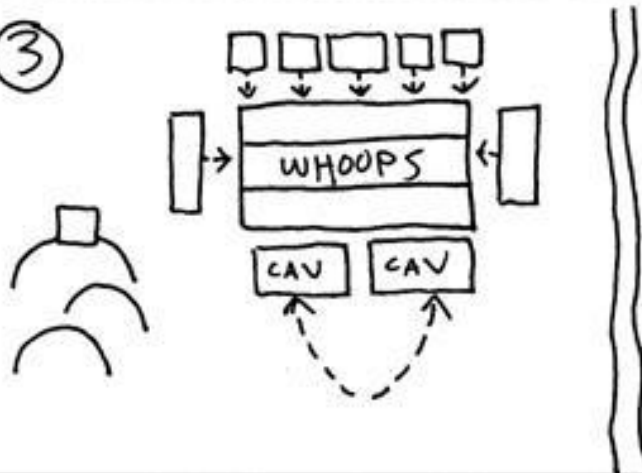
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plain, fearing the destructive force of Hannibal's Numidian cavalry and wanted to move the Roman forces into the nearby hills where the cavalry could be neutralized. Varro however saw the nearly 2-1 advantage the Romans held and wanted to fight an infantry battle in the field and simply overwhelm the Carthaginians. When two consuls were present at the same site there were two ways of dividing command equally between them. One was to divide the army in half and give each consul total discretion over his half of the army. The other, in force at Cannae was for each consul to have total discretion over the whole army every other day. It was on Varro's day of command that the camps were built beside the plains and it was on Varro's day of command that the battle was initiated. There was nothing Paullus could do about it.

Varro ordered the army across a shallow river to where the Carthaginians were lining up for battle. Hannibal hoped to get the Romans to fight a battle he could control with his superior cavalry on the wings. In ordering the Roman battle lines, Varro followed the conventional three-line maniple alignment, but when he saw the way the Carthaginians were lining up he made a critical decision to pack his troops close together and eliminate the checkerboard space between the maniples. His hope was to drive through the weaker Carthaginian infantry, divide Hannibal's army in half and use superior Roman numbers to annihilate Hannibal. However, this left the Romans open to an easy flanking maneuver. It was the same mistake Regulus had made in his battle with Xanthippus outside Carthage during the First Punic War. Varro's mistake was doubly compounded by the fact that Hannibal had deliberately lined his army up to lure the Romans into just such a trap.

The Carthaginian line was deployed in a semi-circle with the front closer to the Romans than the wings. In the center were placed the weaker Spanish and Gallic soldiers, which is what tempted Varro to bunch the legions together. On the wings were the cavalry and between the cavalry and the center were the Libyan infantry. After some light skirmishing, Varro ordered the legions to attack.

At first things seemed to be going well for the Romans. The Spanish and Gallic soldiers were no match for the Romans and were pushed back easily by the reinforced Roman lines. However, caught up in the heat of battle, the Romans did not notice that it was the center and the center only they were pushing back. The Libyans remained where they were and pretty soon the curve of the Carthaginian line had been inverted, with the Libyans now forward of the center. The Romans continued to charge ahead, and before they knew it, the Libyans had

outflanked them, even though they had not yet moved a muscle. The Romans were now hemmed in and suddenly found themselves fighting on three fronts. In the confusion, they were just beginning to work on extracting themselves from what was turning into a bloodbath, when Hannibal closed the trap. His cavalry easily drove off their Roman counterparts and then wheeled around on the Roman rear. The legions were now completely surrounded and, having been placed so close to one another by Varro at the outset of the battle were, in many cases, unable to even lift up their arms to defend themselves.

At a minimum 50,000 Romans died in the slaughter, with estimates going as high as 70,000. These totals included the cream of the Roman leadership: 29 military tribunes and 80 men of senatorial rank including Marcus Rufus Minucius. The consul Paullus who never wanted the battle, was knocked from his horse and refused the offer of another to escape, choosing to die in the field than face the humiliation of surviving such a horrendous defeat. Varro, however, upon whose head the entire debacle rested, had no such qualms about his honor and fled for his life.

The Battle of Cannae has gone down as one of the most famous battles in history. Generals are always looking to emulate Hannibal's perfect destruction of the Romans. Eisenhower referred to Hannibal's plan as a work of art and as recently as the First Gulf War, General Norman Schwarzkopf modeled some of his attacks after Hannibal's formation at Cannae. Though the total envelopment is not nearly as impressive when you are commanding a much larger and more powerful army, it still shows how much this single battle has penetrated the collective consciousness.

Despite the universal praise of Hannibal's genius on the battlefield, what the Carthaginian general did with his victory is the source of the harshest criticisms against him, leveled both by his contemporaries and the judgment of history. Because what he did with his stunning victory was absolutely nothing. It is easy to say that Hannibal should have immediately marched on Rome and taken the city rather than hold off and continue his policy of attempting to turn Rome's allies without actually going near the capital, but even in its weakened state Rome itself would have been more than a match for Hannibal and his paltry army of 35,000. However, it is impossible to say for sure. We have no way of knowing what would have happened if Hannibal had gone for the Eternal City. Whether this was because he didn't think he could pull it off or because he didn't believe a direct assault on Rome was a necessary part of his greater plan is also a matter of endless speculation. In the full light of history though, we know that Cannae

marked the high point of Hannibal's career and closed the first stage of the Second Punic War. Hannibal would never again be so successful and in the following decade, the fortunes of war would turn against Carthage in favor of the Romans and their young rock-star general, Scipio Africanus.

In the Shadow of Cannae

After the utter devastation of Cannae, no one would have blamed the Romans for giving up. The history of the world could have very easily read something like: “But after the defeat at Cannae, the Romans surrendered, they had been beaten soundly over and over again by Hannibal (and on their own turf no less). The Romans agreed to terms and their just recently acquired empire was shattered. Next week on *The History of Carthage* we’ll talk about Hannibal’s falling out with Phillip and the war in the east...”

However, despite the obvious rationales for quitting the fight, Rome’s determination to carry on was only bolstered by their defeats. Roman obstinacy was back with a vengeance. That special blend of honor, pride and masochism that had seen the Romans through so much would see them through this, their darkest hour.

That is not to say the Romans proceeded through their trial unchanged. On the contrary, the early years of the Second Punic War fundamentally altered life in Rome. It was simultaneously and paradoxically a time both of democratization and consolidation of power in the hands of the elites. Popular agitation and rival political factions had sent out field commanders with diametrically opposed aims and the confused Roman strategies were easily exploited by Hannibal. The case of Fabius and Minucius presaged the much greater catastrophe that befell Varro and Paullus. However, after Cannae the senate took control of the war, intent on prosecuting the conflict with something resembling a consistent strategy. The tribunes and the popular assemblies were shut out. The need for quick and coherent policies made the slow turning wheels of democracy not just obsolete but dangerous. The passions of the mob had sent Varro riding off to an ill-conceived battle that nearly destroyed the empire. The senate was not going to let that happen again. The elites seized control and for the most part, the people were content to go along.

However, at the same time this seizure of power was going on, the opportunities for political advancement had never been so readily available. The sons the great patrician families were strewn across the battlefields of Italy. These young men, who would have filled the leadership positions for a generation, were all dead. Rome needed praetors, aediles, and military tribunes. Anyone, patrician or plebeian, who showed a little initiative and bravery was liable to find himself given commands he otherwise could never dream of. The Second Punic War by necessity was a time of great turnover within the leadership class and it was based on merit rather than blood. During

this period the cream rose to the top and Rome was well served for embracing the transition. So while the elites took control, but it was a merit based elite open to all.

Despite the plausibility that some in Rome would have been more than willing to talk peace with Hannibal the histories don't mention any internal conflict over what to do, even to vilify some chicken-hearted minority who wanted out of the war. It seems that on the subject of surrender the Romans were of one mind and they weren't about to do it. So they raised more legions from their endless pool of manpower — although this was becoming harder to do. They both lowered the youngest eligible age and raised the oldest eligible age and in an unprecedented move, purchased 8,000 slaves from their various citizen owners and enrolled them into an army of their own, under the command of Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, the great uncle of the famous Gracchi brothers — who will appear in the late second century to champion the plebeians. Rome was down but not out.

Hannibal's response to his overwhelming victory at Cannae was to do nothing. He did not march on Rome. Instead, he returned to his strategy of cutting the Romans off from the allies. Across the extended communication lines of the Mediterranean, Hannibal stayed in contact with his brother Hasdrubal in Spain and they agreed that Hasdrubal should continue to press against the Romans troops in Iberia to prevent them from returning to guard Italy. The hope was to make the Romans fight for their territory outside Italy while Hannibal made them fight on the peninsula itself. The Carthaginian brothers hoped to split the attention of the Romans in order to conquer them. Retaking Sicily in particular burned on their minds, as their father had been forced to leave the island, not, either brother believed, because he had been bested in the field, but because he had been abandoned by Carthaginian politicians. The history of the "stabbed in the back" theory stretches, as you can see, far back into antiquity.

The Death of King Hiero

In 216 BC, just after the Battle of Cannae, fate stepped in to deliver Sicily to the Carthaginians. Hiero, king of Syracuse and stalwart ally of Rome finally died after 53 years on the throne. He was succeeded by his grandson, Hieronymus who had just turned 15. Though the old king had never faltered in his allegiance to Rome, a large bulk of the nobility was all for breaking away to the Carthaginians, especially after Cannae. When Hieronymus ascended the throne the impressionable youth was easily persuaded to invite the Carthaginians onto the island. A treaty was quickly concluded which promised aid to Carthage in return for staying out of internal Sicilian affairs. The young king immediately began operations against the remaining Roman legions on the island.

Hieronimus, however, proved himself to be the prototypical, depraved, child tyrant and his wanton displays of arrogant despotism soon raised the ire of many a Syracusan. There was still a sizable pro-Roman population within the upper class and while Hieronymus was out on campaign they had him assassinated — much to the relief of the general public. However, the conspirators then badly overplayed their hand and murdered the rest of Hiero's popular family and turned public opinion right back against them. Two Carthaginian generals who had been sent to the island to advise Hieronymus were raised up by the Syracusan soldiers and thrust into a position of supreme command. They returned to Syracuse at the head of the army and ousted the pro-Roman leaders of the coup. Suddenly, just like that, a pair of Carthaginian generals controlled Syracuse.

The War in Spain

News of this unexpected and fortuitous turn of events was music to the ears of Hannibal in Italy and Hasdrubal in Spain. While Hannibal marched south to try to break the already shaky Roman allegiances of Magna Graecia, Hasdrubal attempted to coordinate a campaign against the Scipio brothers.

Publius and Gnaeus Scipio, the father and uncle of Scipio Africanus, however, were proving however to be more than a match for the Carthaginian armies sent against them. Though Hasdrubal was ostensibly in overall command there were three Carthaginian armies in the field and each general had his own ideas about what ought to be done and who ought to receive the glory for driving the Romans out of Spain.

Furthermore, the loyalty of the Spanish mercenaries was always in doubt as they made for the hills any time there was real trouble. Nearly five years of back and forth campaigning progressed in Spain without either side gaining much of anything. The Scipiones did manage to take back Saguntum, the city that had started the war, but beyond that, not much land changed hands.

The Scipiones were making all the right moves and in the tradition of Fabius avoided decisive battles that might knock them out of the war. As much as the Carthaginians were intent on dividing Roman attention, it was the Romans who were getting the better of splitting the theaters of focus. Hasdrubal was looking to dispatch the Scipiones and make for Italy himself to meet up with Hannibal, but the Romans were not going quietly into that good night.

However, in 211 BC, the Scipiones made an ill-advised strategic decision that would bring them both to ruin. Bolstered by 20,000 Celtiberian mercenaries, the 30,000 Romans found themselves in a position where they outnumbered two nearby Carthaginian armies, including the force commanded by Hasdrubal. The Carthaginians had roughly 35,000 men at their disposal and the Scipiones decided the time was ripe to punch out the Carthaginians. They split their own army, with Gnaeus leading about a third of the Romans and all the Celtiberians against Hasdrubal, while Publius led the bulk of the Romans against the other Carthaginian army. However, unbeknownst to the Roman generals, the army Publius was attacking was in the process of being reinforced and the Celtiberians under Gnaeus' command had been bribed to desert at the outset of any battle. So rather than having the advantage on both fronts the Scipiones were outnumbered everywhere. Publius arrived at his objective first, but

after some confused night fighting and the surprise arrival of a large contingent of the deadly Numidian cavalry, the Romans were pushed back and then broken. Publius Scipio

himself was killed in the fighting while only a small number of his army managed to escape.

Unaware of what had happened to his brother Gnaeus confidently approached Hasdrubal. The Carthaginian stalled for time until he was sure that things in the north were unfolding according to plan and then formed up for battle. Gnaeus ordered his men out and was horrified to find the Celtiberians good to their word, and immediately deserted. Left with only about 10,000 troops, Gnaeus didn't stand a chance. He oversaw one of the great last stands in history fortifying a hopeless position with saddles and backpacks and fighting it out to the last man. In the span of a few days both Roman commanders and the bulk of the legions in Spain lay dead.

Now I know what you're thinking: how is it that the Romans lost every decisive battle and still managed to win the war? Well, I'll tell you: they didn't lose every decisive battle in the war. In fact, at the same time the Romans were losing in Spain they were winning in Sicily.

The War in Sicily

Back in Sicily, the Romans sent Marcus Claudius Marcellus to reinforce the two legions already stationed on the island. These numbers included the survivors of Cannae who were forced to serve in exile in Sicily without leave or any hope at all of returning home. Broadly speaking the troops who survived Cannae did their best to die in battle where they could at least reclaim some of their lost honor. Marcellus' orders were simple. Take back Sicily and regain control of the vital food supplies Rome needed to survive while Hannibal was ravaging the Italian countryside.

Marcellus immediately ordered a siege of Syracuse. The city had yet to be taken by an invading army, and had repelled all comers over the years, but Marcellus was intent on conquering the unconquerable city. His first attempt was a spectacular failure. The ace in the hole of the Syracusans was their great mathematician, physicist, astronomer, inventor and all around genius Archimedes who designed a number of defensive weapons for the city to help repel invaders. For the current war effort, Archimedes had designed grappling hooks that could be lowered from the walls and effect risk free devastation on Roman naval assaults as well as catapults that launched ridiculous sized boulders at the Romans with ease. It should come as no surprise to anyone that the great scientist died at the hands of a Roman soldier after the city was taken.

Repelled in his initial assault, Marcellus settled in to starve the city out. Two-and-a-half years passed before the stalemate was broken. A group of pro-Roman nobles slipped through the lines and arranged to betray the city into Roman hands. The Romans timed an attack to coincide with a local festival and managed to scale the walls and take control of most of the city before they were detected. The Carthaginian generals in charge retreated behind an inner wall, holing up in the citadel.

Another stalemate ensued. The Carthaginians attempted to relieve the city by sending a number of fleets, but a combination of foul weather and Roman interference kept most help away. To make matters worse a plague swept across Sicily in 211 BC devastating the Carthaginian army looking for an opportunity to aid the Syracusans, and brought those trapped in the city to their knees. After being abandoned by the Carthaginian generals, those still holding out surrendered, and Marcellus claimed Syracuse for Rome. Then in an uncharacteristic display of barbarism, Marcellus turned his troops loose on the city with permission to haul off anything they could. It

was in the course of this looting that Archimedes was killed. The sack of Syracuse shocked even the Romans, who still looked with reverence on the great Greek city and were horrified to hear how poorly its citizens, art and treasure had been treated. However, they were not so torn up that they did not celebrate an ovation for Marcellus upon his return to Rome.

The First Macedonian War

Before we continue with the main action in Italy and Spain, we need to detour into the third major foreign theater of the war. Although critically important to the war effort, the struggle with the Macedonians in the east has received little attention. For the most part it featured Greek allies fighting on behalf of Rome, rather than involving the Romans directly. The war in the east also paid a key but subsidiary function in that it kept Philip V out of the war and so although inextricably linked to the war with Hannibal, the First Macedonian War was entirely different. It is important not so much in the context of the Second Punic War, but for setting the stage for the next 50 years of Roman history, which will revolve around the Roman conquest of Greece.

Not long after Cannae, Hannibal and Philip V of Macedon signed a formal treaty and pledged mutual support against each other's enemies. Philip was the young leader of a newly resurgent Macedon who had visions of reuniting Greece under Macedonian rule as his namesake Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, had done. Rome, which had played no part in Philip II's calculations, now loomed large in Philip V's. The Romans were already entrenched in Illyria and despite their claims of temporary occupation, they showed no signs of leaving. After the disaster at Cannae, Hannibal made formal overtures to the Macedonian king and Philip immediately accepted. The deal would leave Philip in control of Rome's eastern territory when Hannibal inevitably won the war and would provide him a steady Carthaginian supply line for his planned move against the rest of Greece. It also cemented a mutual sphere of influence that allayed both side's fear of territorial encroachment.

Deal in hand, Philip's envoys returned to Macedon, but on the way across the Adriatic they were captured by the Roman navy. Immediately recognizing the danger of Hannibal's eastern alliance, Rome was forced to turn its already divided attention to one more front. However, without troops to spare they sent a scant force of about 2,000 with orders not to simply engage Philip, but instead to drum up Greek support for Rome and attempt to get the Greeks to fight Philip for them.

This turned out to be easier than they thought. The Greeks were not happy in the slightest about Philip's ambition and despite their own prejudice against the barbaric Italians, they recognized the Romans for what they were — a force that could help blunt Macedon's influence. Specifically, Rome found a receptive audience in the

Aetolian League, a confederation of cities that stood between Macedon and Greece proper. Knowing they would be among the first swallowed by Philip's territorial ambition, the Aetolians embraced Rome as their road both to continued independence and also possible dominance in post war Greece and agreed to counter Philip any way they could.

The Macedonian king had his eye on driving the Romans out of their coastal garrisons in Illyria so he could establish a port from which to launch attacks on Italy. The Aetolians agreed to launch incursions into Macedon every time Philip tried to turn west. Every time Philip left for Illyria, the Aetolians would begin making trouble. This ten-year war of skirmishes is, in the context of Roman history, called the First Macedonian War, but that makes more of it than it really was. It was the Second Macedonian War that really marked the first time the Romans moved east and fought the Greeks directly.

Although the First Macedonian War was not a direct engagement between the Romans and Macedonians and won the Romans no territory, this conflict in the east between the Macedonians and Roman-allied Greeks served the function it was meant to — it kept Philip out of the war with Hannibal.

Exchanging Italian Cities Ad Nauseam

Back in Italy, one of most important consequences of Hannibal's victory at Cannae was the decision by the nobility of Capua, the second most important Italian city, to defect to the Carthaginian side. Hannibal expected this defection to be followed by the rest of Italy, but it was not meant to be. Capua's alliance with the Carthaginians did not sway the rest of the Italy as Hannibal (and no doubt the Capuans themselves) hoped it would. Rather than putting them in the vanguard of history, Capua found itself immediately isolated and recognizing that they might have bought high on Hannibal's stock. Certainly Capua's experience for the rest of the war was not a happy tale of preparing to rule Italy with Carthaginian backing, but instead a sad tale of enduring a Roman siege, finally begging for forgiveness, and ultimately a whole lot of beheadings.

But for now it was all still sunshine and roses for Hannibal. With Capua in on his side and Syracuse recently brought into the Carthaginian fold, Hannibal marched south to Magna Graecia with high hopes. The pinnacle of the Carthaginian campaign was reached in 212 BC when Hannibal won control of the rich Greek port city of Tarentum. The pro-Roman party in the city was ousted by a group of young nobles, who handed the city over to the Carthaginians. It was, however, at Tarentum that Hannibal's fortune left him. As he marched into the city, the Roman garrison stationed there fought its way into the citadel and held it.

The citadel at Tarentum was situated on the coast and could be supplied independently of the rest of the city. Hannibal was never able to dislodge the garrison and so was denied a safe Italian port to resupply his invasion force. This would prove critical down the road as the Carthaginian senate was loath to send supply ships and men to reinforce Hannibal when there was no guarantee they would reach their destination.

Annoyed by this thorn in his side, Hannibal's attention was forced back north to Capua where his new ally was under siege by Roman forces. After Cannae, the Roman grand strategy abandoned any hope of taking on Hannibal directly — they had by now touched that hot stove enough to recognize that it burnt. So rather than sending an army south to confront Hannibal, they laid siege to Capua and attempted to flip them back to the Roman side. If you have ever played the ancient Chinese board game Go, you are probably familiar with the proverb: “when in doubt...Tenuki.” Which translates roughly, “when in doubt...ignore your opponent.” Good advice and the

Romans were wise to take it. By attacking Capua the Romans forced Hannibal into a position where he was reacting to Roman moves rather than the Romans reacting to his. For the first time in the war, the Romans held the initiative.

Hannibal attempted to respond in kind to the Romans by trying to take back the initiative. Instead of making for Capua, he drove instead for the one city he had studiously avoided, Rome itself. In 211 BC, Hannibal marched within two miles of the city, the closest he would ever get to Rome, and waited for the Romans to fly into a panic, lift the siege at Capua and come running home. However, the Romans did not bite at the obvious gambit. They knew Hannibal's army was not strong enough to take Rome by force and so they only broke off a portion of their siege army to reinforce the city. Capua remained under arms and growing more desperate by the day. His bluff called, Hannibal withdrew. The pro-Carthaginian leadership of Capua, now abandoned by Hannibal, was overthrown by pro-Roman forces and the city surrendered. The penalties for treason were harsh and the beheadings commenced with bloody abandon. Though in typical Roman fashion their fury was directed at the leadership, not the city as a whole and the sanctions imposed on Capua were light compared to the stress their defection had put on the Roman war effort.

One of the main reasons I began *The History of Rome* was to distill the often mind-numbing minutiae of the ancient historians into digestible chunks. The middle years of the Second Punic War is a period that cries for summarization. Livy fills hundreds of pages detailing every lost city, every betrayal, every conversation with every political faction and every minor skirmish. The information is out there for those of you who would like more detail, but I now offer with great relish the following paragraph:

The experience of Capua and Tarentum was repeated *ad nauseam* over the next few years. Hannibal would take a city and then move on. The Romans would follow behind and return it to the Roman fold. Hannibal would then be forced to either back-track and re-fight for land he had already taken, or give up what he had gotten and hope for better luck the next time around. The two armies occasionally came into direct contact. Sometimes Hannibal would win, sometimes the Romans would. However, victory no longer took the form of annihilated armies, but rather strategic withdrawals and prudent retreats. In this way five years passed.

Beautiful.

The Rise of Scipio Africanus

Meanwhile on the Spanish front it looked as if the Romans would never regain their footing after the defeats of the Scipiones. Certainly, no Roman general was eager to take up the difficult task in Spain. All that remained in Iberia was the bare remnants of the defeated legions and a horde of Carthaginians and hostile Spanish tribes. Officially Rome had no intention of giving up in Spain, but practically speaking they were about to do just that.

Into this leadership vacuum stepped a young man, Scipio Africanus who was destined to become a towering figure in Roman history. In the lineage of truly great Romans, the short list begins with Romulus passes to Camillus and then passes to Scipio, perhaps the greatest of them all. It would be another 250 years before Rome would see another man like Scipio Africanus, in the person of Julius Caesar.

Scipio Africanus, at this point, was still simply Publius Scipio son of Publius Scipio the elder. He would not earn the cognomen Africanus until after his return from Zama. At this point Scipio the younger was an untested youth who impetuously stepped forward in the senate and offered to take command in Spain if no one else would. The senate was unenthusiastic, but given the circumstances they had nothing to lose. It was essentially take a chance on Scipio or admit defeat in Spain. So Scipio received the command.

It was not just his youth that worried the Roman old guard, but also Scipio's personality. Old warhorses like Fabius did not like the look of young Scipio one bit. For one thing he had long hair like a woman. For another thing, he had a distressing habit of talking as if he personally spoke to the gods and was acting on their behalf. In later years, he would often return from long strolls and announce battle plans as if they had been given to him by Mars himself. Finally and most troublesome of all to the keepers of tradition, traditions Scipio seemed to delight in flouting, he was enormously charismatic. Scipio represented a changing of the guard and despite his success, or perhaps because of it, he was looked upon with real fear by his elders. He was an incredibly magnetic cross between Jim Morrison, Alexander the Great and Jesus. For those looking to keep things exactly as they are, a figure like that leads to many a sleepless night.

However, Scipio's flouting of tradition was the key to his success. He and old Fabius agreed on one thing: the Roman legions, presently constituted, were no match for the Carthaginians. Whereas Fabius read this to mean the Carthaginians should not be fought directly, Scipio read it to mean the Romans had to fundamentally alter their

tactics. Hannibal beat the Romans over and over again with cunning and imagination. So where the Romans had previously shown nothing but uninspired plodding, Scipio hoped to give the Carthaginians a taste of their own medicine and out-think his opponents rather than simply try and out-fight them.

Scipio in Spain

Scipio arrived in Spain with 10,000 men in 210 BC with vague instructions to regain lost Roman territory. He had no intention of fighting a defensive war. His long term goal was to end the war completely and he saw Spain as his proving ground. If he succeeded here, the senate might offer him overall command of the legions and allow him to pursue his real dream of invading North Africa and conquering Carthage. He would be unable to convince the conservative senators today, but if he drove the Carthaginians out of Spain, he might gain their ear.

So after spending his first year in Spain getting a feel for the land and the locals, he embarked on an audacious assault of the largest, strongest and richest of the Carthaginian strongholds — New Carthage itself. The three Carthaginian armies still out in the field had no idea the new Roman commander would attempt such a bold move. However, the element of surprise was the element Scipio felt was key to victory, and so unbeknownst even to his subordinate commanders, he ordered his army to march toward the Carthaginian capital. The only other Roman who was in on the plan was a close Scipio confidant named Laelius who commanded the Roman navy in the area. He was ordered to make for New Carthage and simultaneously attack from sea as Scipio engaged from the land.

The small garrison at New Carthage was shocked when the Roman navy appeared on the horizon and was doubly shocked when a Roman army came marching over the hill. The nearest Carthaginian army was days away, more than enough time, Scipio felt, to take the city and fortify it before reinforcements could arrive. He attempted a direct assault on the first day but was repelled. That night, he received a critical piece of intelligence. A local pointed out that at certain times during the day, the lagoon that bordered one of the walls of the city drained with the tides and became shallow enough to ford. The next morning Scipio ordered a full assault on the front gate and while the defenders concentrated all their attention on that spot, Scipio himself led a small contingent through the shallow and unwatched lagoon and scaled the walls. They easily overpowered what resistance they found and when the Romans suddenly appeared behind the troops defending the wall, the Carthaginians panicked and broke for the Citadel, allowing Scipio to open the gate and let the rest of the army in. It was only a matter of time before the unprovisioned force in the Citadel was forced to surrender. In about 36 hours, Scipio had captured the Carthaginian capital.

In a move designed to gain Spanish support, Scipio released the members of the various local ruling families who had been held by the Carthaginians as hostages. By this one act alone Scipio did more for the Roman position in Spain than all the battles in the world. The Carthaginians were immediately on the defensive and found their Spanish allies deserting in droves. Leaving a garrison behind to protect the newly conquered city, he marched out with the rest of his army in search of Hasdrubal, Hannibal's brother and the architect of the Scipio family's dishonor. In 208 BC Scipio caught up with Hasdrubal and fought a running battle in the middle of Spain. Hasdrubal, however, managed to slip away and lead his army northwest to the Atlantic coast. Hannibal's brother had decided fighting young Scipio in Spain was counterproductive and made the decision to leave Spain for Italy. The best way to regain the upper hand in Spain was to deal the Romans another crushing blow in Italy.

Battle of Ilipa — 206 BC

However, the Carthaginian senate was not ready to cede Spain to Scipio quite so easily and sent 50,000 reinforcements to defeat the dynamic young Roman general. In 206 BC, the two sides met at Ilipa. The battle that followed would be, tactically at least, Scipio's finest hour. Outnumbered by a sizeable margin, the Carthaginians were confident they could beat the so far undefeated Scipio. However, the Roman general, taking a lesson from Hannibal, employed a clever trick that turned an unlikely win into an easy victory.

Each morning the two sides would line up for battle and wait for the other to make a move and each day neither would budge and the day would pass without a battle. When Scipio deployed his troops he concentrated the core of the legions in the center and placed his Spanish allies on the wings. The opposing Carthaginian General got used to this formation and placed his strongest troops in the center and his own weaker Spanish mercenaries on the wings. On the morning Scipio decided to fight, however, he changed his battle line.

However, first he took revenge on the Carthaginians for the Roman defeat at Trebia, where Scipio had probably fought. He ordered his cavalry to attack the Carthaginian camp in the early morning. This time it was the Carthaginians who were roused from their beds and forced to charge out without a good breakfast. They formed for battle in the usual line, but the Romans had changed their battle formation. Scipio put the Spanish in the center and deployed the legions on the wings. When the Carthaginian general did not notice the switch Scipio knew victory was his for the taking. He waited most of the day while the Carthaginians suffered, hungry and tired under the hot afternoon sun and then ordered the attack. The Roman wings led the charge, easily destroying the under-matched opposing Spanish wings. The Libyans and Carthaginians in the center suddenly found themselves flanked on both sides by the Romans. In the confusion, they didn't even attack the Roman center where they may have won an escape route. Instead, they stayed put and were caught in a pincer. The only thing that saved them was that the weather turned ugly and rain turned the field into a mud-clogged morass.

The Carthaginians were able to escape, but their will was broken. Scipio pursued the fleeing army and destroyed them a few weeks later.

When Scipio entered Spain, the Carthaginians controlled practically the entire country, now the Romans were the undisputed masters. Carthaginian influence in Spain was over and in a few years hence the

great war would be over as well. Scipio now had all the clout he needed to take his master plan to the senate. There would be fierce resistance to the idea of an African invasion, but Scipio's charisma and track record would carry the day.

Hannibal Isolated

Though neither side was aware of it, the long war between Rome and Carthage was marching inexorably toward a final conclusion. For the Romans, the scourge of Hannibal seemed a virus they would never be able to purge from their body. Not strong enough to conquer the Romans, yet too strong to be driven off, Hannibal had wreaked havoc in Italy for a decade and there was no indication he would ever leave. The Fabian strategy of countering Hannibal's political moves without risking open battle was now firmly entrenched. Even those commanders who broke from this tradition found themselves chasing a ghost. Hannibal would never fight a battle not of his own devising and stayed one-step ahead of Roman pursuit.

Hannibal himself knew that things could not continue forever. The Carthaginian senate was growing weary of the war — supplies and reinforcements came in ever shrinking numbers and required ever more cajoling. Eventually Hannibal would find himself isolated in enemy territory, abandoned by his country. It was fast turning into a replay of his father's war in Sicily. He did not have the money or manpower to launch a decisive offensive, even if the Romans still went to bed in fear of the Carthaginian army pouring through the gates while they slept.

Entering 207 BC, the eleventh year since Hannibal had left New Carthage for Italy, the Carthaginian commander still hoped for a successful conclusion. His brother Hasdrubal had left Spain after tangling with young Scipio and was making his way across Gaul, through the Alps. Soon he would be in Italy with an army of 30,000. If the two brothers were able link up they would form an army that could overrun anything the Romans sent against them.

The Battle of the Metaurus — 207 BC

The Romans were aware of the threat they faced from this second invading army. When Hasdrubal passed into the Po valley, he was immediately shadowed by two Roman legions led by Consul Marcus Livius. Livius kept to the high ground, not having enough troops to openly confront Hasdrubal, but hoping to at least forestall the Carthaginians if they attempted to move further south. Hasdrubal knew there was no army in the area capable of matching him and so moved confidently through the Italian countryside, picking up Gallic allies and waiting for word from his brother on where to meet up.

The other consul, Gaius Claudius Nero, was encamped with his army some 250 miles south keeping watch on Hannibal's army. He knew that neither his army nor Livius's in the north could halt the movement of the Carthaginian armies they each shadowed. Only if they were able to concentrate Roman force against one or the other could they hope to prevent the disaster of a combined Carthaginian army. So Nero made a snap decision and embarked on a risky adventure. Leaving a token force in camp to keep up appearances, he ordered the bulk of his army out in the middle of the night and force-marched north to link up with Livius and hopefully annihilate Hasdrubal before Hannibal realized what was happening.

Roman luck held and Nero was able to close the 250-mile gap in a mere seven days, with his troops left behind tending multiple fires and manning round the clock guard duty so Hannibal would believe a full Roman army was still encamped. Nero linked up with Livius and marched his troops into his colleague's camp at night. Though the Romans tried to keep this arrival secret, word soon leaked to Hasdrubal of the numerically superior enemy he now faced and he attempted to withdraw, making his way along the Metaurus River. The two consular armies took off at once in pursuit and were soon able to trap Hasdrubal's tired army against the river. The battle that followed turned from an equal engagement into a rout when Nero led a portion of his troops around behind the Carthaginians and surprised the rear. Hasdrubal, knowing the end was near, charged into the middle of the battle and died fighting. The hope of a Carthaginian super-army died there on the banks of the Metaurus along with Hannibal's last hope of conquering the Romans.

Scipio Makes His Pitch

The Romans were ecstatic at the news. It was the first major battle in Italy the Romans had won. To young Scipio, returning from his command in Spain, word of the victory was music to his ears. The high spirits of his compatriots and low threat now posed by Hannibal produced the exact psychological environment Scipio needed to ensure a receptive audience for his plan to invade North Africa.

In 205 BC, after a year of inactivity, Scipio went before the senate and pitched his idea. The time had come, he argued, to return to the original strategy abandoned at the outset of the war. The fight had to be taken to the Carthaginians. Hannibal could not be driven off through direct action. The only way to be rid of him was to attack Carthage and force the Carthaginian senate to recall Hannibal to protect the mother city.

However, Scipio was not without detractors in the senate, chief amongst them old Marcus Fabius, now 70 years old. What Scipio pitched was the exact opposite of everything Fabius stood for. The old warhorse argued that with Hasdrubal's defeat, the Romans should stick with the limited objective of re-securing the Po valley and continuing the war of attrition against Hannibal that, though lacking the flare of Scipio's bold plan, had proven so successful. Generational tensions played out, with Scipio accusing old Fabius of being too cautious and stuck in his ways and Fabius reminding young Scipio that had it not been for his caution Rome would have fallen a decade earlier. However, the aura of Scipio carried the day and, with reservations attached, he was given the go ahead for an invasion.

Masinissa Switches Sides

The young Roman general embarked for Sicily where he began to make his preparations, building a fleet and gathering troops. Of vital importance was a mission he assigned to Laelius, the naval commander who had been in Scipio's confidence at the siege of New Carthage.

The most formidable part of the Carthaginian army was the Numidian cavalry. They were superior in speed or skill and as long as they remained in the opposing line, the legions would always be in danger. Scipio knew something of North African politics though, and hoped to turn a clear weakness into an advantage. Laelius's mission was to sail to North Africa and bring the Numidians to the Roman side. The Numidians, after all, were not Carthaginians. They were a client state of Carthage and had long chafed under Carthaginian rule. Though the leadership seemed more or less content to stick with Carthage, there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction that always threatened to come to the surface.

In North Africa Laelius made contact with the exiled Prince Masinissa, who had fought against Scipio in Spain, and confirmed that he was ready and willing to lead his followers in a revolt both against his own king and the Carthaginians. In the years to come Masinissa would remain a staunch ally of Rome, matching in many ways the friendship of Hiero. A young man at the time of the Second Punic War, Masinissa would reign over Numidia for 50 years nipping in the bud any trouble posed to the Romans from Africa.

Scipio's Invasion of North Africa

Scipio sailed for North Africa in 203 BC with a force of about 35,000. His aim was to end the war or die trying. When the Romans landed they immediately swept through the land west of Carthage taking prisoners and sacking towns. Scipio had his eye on the major city of Utica and in the autumn of 203 he besieged the city. The Carthaginians sent a massive army against Scipio, reportedly in excess of 70,000 troops to drive the Romans off. Scipio prudently withdrew and to throw the Carthaginians off, he opened peace negotiations. While the talks commenced, Scipio scouted his enemy and formulated a plan to beat them without having to take the field against the larger army.

The fake talks concluded, Scipio sent a portion of his troops back to Utica to feign a return to the siege. However, while the unsuspecting Carthaginians slept, content to arise the next morning and overwhelm the Roman pest, Scipio dispatched the bulk of his army toward the enemy camp. Under cover of darkness they started fires all over the camp and waited by the exits. The alarm was raised, and when the panicked soldiers came pouring out of the gates, they were slaughtered by the Romans. Those who were not killed by the Romans died in the fire. It was a horrible and bloody affair, but just like that Scipio had destroyed most of Carthaginian army in North Africa.

The Carthaginians regrouped, however, and made a last stand, but at a place called Great Plains Scipio routed them and Carthage found itself suddenly without an army in the field. At this point the Carthaginian senate was left with no choice. Hannibal had to be recalled.

Envoys were sent to Italy in 202 BC to bring him back. With tears streaming from his one good eye, Hannibal reluctantly ordered his army to board the ships sent to retrieve them. After 16 years, the death of his brothers and an endless series of maneuvers designed to bring the Romans to their knees he was being pulled out of Italy no closer to his goal than when he started. His life's work had been for naught. It was an exhausted and psychologically wounded Hannibal who returned to North Africa. He would fight bravely in North Africa and no historians fault any of the decisions he made while battling Scipio, but the imaginative genius who so flummoxed the Romans early in the war was gone. All the vital energy was in the confident hands of Scipio and both seemed to know it.

Battle of Zama — 202 BC

After his victories near the coast and with the knowledge of Hannibal's return, Scipio did not make for Carthage, but rather marched inland. The interior of North Africa was hostile territory not just for the Romans but also for the Carthaginians. The land was populated with subject people of dubious Carthaginian loyalty who nonetheless were a critical source of food for the city. Scipio hoped to draw Hannibal into unfriendly territory by threatening Carthage with starvation.

Hannibal himself despaired at his situation. He had to make a move against Scipio, but the troops he had at his disposal were not even close to a match for the Romans. He had his core of veterans, but the rest were recent recruits, ill-trained and passionless. He argued against leading such a weak army out, but the senate overruled him and ordered him to track down Scipio and defeat him and being the obedient soldier, he followed his orders.

The two armies met at Zama, a hundred or so miles southwest of Carthage. Prior to any armed confrontation, the two great generals met. Hannibal attempted to secure a favorable peace, knowing his own troops were ill equipped to deal with the Romans, but Scipio would have none of it. After acknowledging the respect each had for the other, they departed to their own tents to prepare for battle.

Lining up in the morning Hannibal placed his raw recruits in the front line with his veterans behind. This way the new troops would have no place to run if they tried to retreat and, if Hannibal was lucky, they would tire the legionaries out and allow the Carthaginian veterans to sweep through them. He also placed his war elephants, the old Carthaginian juggernaut at the head of the army. However, Scipio was well prepared for the elephants and positioned his men so that lanes were open all the way through the lines. When the elephants charged they passed harmlessly by. The battle began and Rome scored a victory that had eluded them the entire war. Masinissa's allied Numidian cavalry was able to drive off their Carthaginian counterparts suddenly leaving Hannibal, rather than the Romans, without support. Just as Hannibal had predicted the experienced Romans cut through his new soldiers, but a total rout was prevented by the strength of his veterans who blunted the Roman advance. The war hung in the balance as two of the greatest strategic and tactical geniuses in history oversaw an unimaginative clash of brute force. When the Roman cavalry returned to attack the Carthaginian rear, the battle turned decisively against Hannibal. His army was broken and

the great Carthaginian general was forced to withdraw in defeat. The Battle of Zama was over. So too was the Second Punic War.

Carthage offered no further resistance and accepted punishing terms. While allowed to keep possessions in North Africa, the dream of a Carthaginian Empire overseas was crushed and all holdings forfeited to the Romans. Carthage was not allowed to equip an army or navy, nor allowed to engage in any hostilities with their neighbors without explicit Roman permission. For his loyalty Masinissa was granted control over an independent Numidian kingdom that would be the dominant force in North Africa for years to come. Finally, a huge punitive fine was laid on Carthage to be paid off in no less than 50 years. In a final irony it was Hannibal who put a stop to any call for further resistance and demanded that the senate accept Roman terms. Carthage was defeated.

Impact of the Second Punic War

The Romans had paid an enormous price for the victory, the population of Rome declined by about 17 percent over the course of the war and the treasury was all but empty. However, they had won an immeasurably valuable prize: uncontested control over the entire western Mediterranean. The Roman Empire as we now know it — the greatest power in the ancient world and one of the farthest reaching land empires in history was born on that day at Zama in 202 BC. As I mentioned earlier, some also claim, that the victory over Carthage also marked the death of old Roman virtue.

Certainly, there is much to be said for the theory that the Republic could not long outlive Rome's greatest enemy. Over the course of the war the power of the senate had grown to exceed by far that of the people's assemblies, and democracy, such as had existed, was a thing of the past. The republic was now a true aristocratic oligarchy. The senate was firmly in control of Rome and would maintain its dominance for the rest of the republican period.

But soon enough, the egos of the foremost families in Rome began to grow unchecked and men emerged every day who had no truck with the old restraint shown by their forefathers. Scipio had inadvertently introduced the cult of personality to the Romans and the coming age of troubles would revolve around powerful men who put their own ambition above the withered sense of propriety. The Gracchi brothers, Marius, Sulla, Julius Caesar, Pompey and finally Augustus would drive Roman politics in the coming years. They took their cues from Scipio who was nearly deified in his lifetime rather than from the string of forgotten consuls who preserved tradition in anonymity. These latter day Roman leaders never dealt with the humility of facing an external threat that could check their personal ambition. Control of Rome now meant control of the whole world. What chance did the republic have when absolute power was at stake?

The Second Punic War was republican Rome's greatest triumph and marked a new era of Roman history. The Romans henceforth would turn east to the great civilization of Greece. Contact with the Greeks would forever alter the character of the Romans as they were introduced to the luxury, philosophy, art and science of the east. While the marriage of East and West would be proposed on the field of battle, it would be consummated in the minds of the victorious Romans, who became open to ideas that would have made their frugal and virtuous ancestors shudder.

Chapter 24

The Second Macedonian War

200 – 197 BC

Rome's victory over Carthage in 202 BC left her the undisputed master of the western Mediterranean. After nearly 20 years locked in a hugely destructive conflict, one might assume that the Romans would take some time off. After all, the demise of Carthage left no challenge to the Roman hegemony in the west and there was an abundance of new trading opportunities, lands to settle, farms to rebuild and families to grow. Why not enjoy the fruits of their newfound dominance and retire peacefully to country estates to grow olives and sip wine? Beat the swords into plowshares as it were, and leave the battlefield unstained with Roman blood. At least for a little while. A generation? Maybe?

Not likely.

Immediately after winning the west, the Romans wasted no time leveraging their newfound big-boy status and embroiling themselves in the cutthroat world of Greek power politics. The rationale behind intervention in the east is obscure and at first blush doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense. The Romans had no long-standing ties in Greece and no true investment in the region. They had finally won control of their region and it seems strange they would risk what they had just achieved by suddenly launching themselves into the middle of a game they had never competed in before or stood any real chance of winning without immense effort. But history is what it is and rather than taking a breath the Romans moved east as a first step toward capturing the whole of the Mediterranean — a feat never before accomplished and never again matched.

Greek Politics

Roman intervention in Greece was precipitated by a fateful pact between two men who would command the armies opposite the legions in the coming decades: Philip V of Macedon and Antiochus the Great of the Seleucid Empire.

The eastern Mediterranean was still very much a post-Alexandrian world and the dominant kingdoms jockeying for position had grown from the satrapies established by Alexander the Great's generals. Egypt was ruled by the descendants of Ptolemy, Syria and Persia were ruled by the descendants of Seleucus, and Macedon, the birthplace of the great general, was again rising to a position of power under Philip V after years of dynastic struggles.

In 204 BC, as Scipio was launching his expedition against Carthage, Ptolemy IV of Egypt died, leaving his six- year old son as heir. Seizing quickly on the leadership vacuum in Egypt Philip and Antiochus agreed to jointly exploit the situation and move against Egyptian holdings in Asia Minor and Syria. The idea was simple: Attack quickly on two fronts and conquer what territory they could. Around the same time Scipio was dictating terms to the Carthaginians, Antiochus moved south toward the Red Sea and Philip moved east, attacking Thrace — the territory west of the narrow sea lane that links the Aegean and the Black Sea.

This joint action immediately upset the balance of power in Greece and upset the Kingdom of Pergamum, which lay on the east side of the Hellespont (the Hellespont is known today as the Dardanelles). Attalus I, king of Pergamum was certain that nothing good could come from an alliance between Philip and Antiochus. Attalus's kingdom in Asia Minor bordered both rival powers, and it was not hard to divine where the two allied kings would look next when they were done stripping young Ptolemy of his inheritance. Luckily, Attalus had built up invaluable goodwill from the ascendant Romans who were still elated from their victory over Carthage. Attalus had been amongst those allied with Rome against Macedon during the First Macedonian War. Along with the Aetolians, Attalus had helped keep Philip's attention firmly in Greece — and the Romans understood the role this played in their ultimate victory. Attalus hoped they were prepared to repay the favor.

Pergamum, allied with the island kingdom of Rhodes, was for the time being holding off Macedonian encroachment, but in 201 BC official envoys were sent to Rome to plead for aid. The Roman senate, while not forgetting their friendship with Attalus, nonetheless sent the

Greek envoys away without the promise of aid. They had just concluded a costly war with Carthage—now was not the time to go plunging headlong into Greece.

However, elements within the senate argued for immediate action. Philip had been moving for years against Rome and if his ambition was allowed to proceed unchecked, when his attention inevitably turned back to the west, he would be wealthier and more powerful. If Rome was worried about the cost of a war today, think of what the costs would be tomorrow. The senate decided to send envoys to Greece to take the temperature of the locals and reassess whether the Romans needed to take a stand now or whether they could afford to wait.

Roman Ultimatum

On the road to Athens the Roman envoys were fast concluding that a war with Macedon was the last thing anyone wanted. However, coinciding with their arrival in Athens, the Athenians declared war against Macedon and Philip ordered a force to pacify Attica. Meeting with Attalus and ambassadors from Rhodes, the Romans decided to issue an ultimatum to Macedon. Clear out of Greece and come to terms with Pergamum and Rhodes or deal with the consequences. The Macedonian force in Attica retreated and the message was taken to Philip.

The Macedonian king rejected the ultimatum, ordered his forces to attack Athens again and moved east himself to the Hellespont where he launched a campaign to wrest control of the eastern bank from Pergamum. In 200 BC Roman envoys found Philip still directing his troops along Pergamum's border and issued a second ultimatum: withdraw from all Greek cities and confine himself back to traditional Macedonian territory or he would be looking at war with Rome. Philip protested that nothing he had done was in violation of the treaty he had signed with the Romans at the end of the First Macedonian War and they were reaching well beyond their authority if they thought they could dictate policy so far from Italy.

The second ultimatum however was a mere formality. At the same time that the Roman envoys were explaining what they would do if Philip rejected peace, Rome was already launching an army, knowing that Philip would never accept Roman terms. Confident after securing allies in Greece, the senate had changed its tune and decided that war now was preferable to war later. Philip had to be stopped before he was too strong.

War in Macedon

Legions under the command of Publius Galba were sent across the Adriatic into Illyria, the Roman beachhead in the east. What followed was a year of indeterminate skirmishing with neither side doing much to risk their armies. Philip was still trying to get a handle on whether the Romans were truly committed to a war and didn't want to give them a reason to fully commit themselves, and Galba had no real interest in a full-on attack. The next year saw a changing of consuls but the continuation of the same policy. Open war was not being courted and the entire affair seemed destined for counter maneuvers until the two sides made concessions to one another and reached an amenable peace.

However, in the third year, 198 BC, things would change. Titus Flaminius was elected consul and given command of Greek operations. He fully embraced the notion that Philip had to be weakened or Macedon would pose a constant threat to Rome. Beyond these immediate strategic interests, Flaminius himself was a great lover of Greek culture and saw Roman exposure to and power over Greece as inherently beneficial and well worth fighting for. Flaminius took a bold stand against Philip and, hoping to win over the mostly neutral Greek cities, recast Roman policy as a defense of Greek liberty. In this conception Rome was not another power looking for new territory, but a shield against Macedonian tyranny. This recasting of the struggle won over the elites of the Greek city States and momentum began to shift toward Rome.

His diplomatic coup well under way, Flaminius matched word with action and went looking for Philip's army, intent on breaking the Macedonians. Late in the year, a short battle was fought between the two armies with the upshot being the withdrawal of Philip's and the stage being set for a larger, decisive confrontation the following year.

The Greeks were flocking to Rome and away from Macedon. Sensing that the ball game had changed and the Romans were now serious about the fight, Philip made peace overtures to Flaminius. The Roman consul opened negotiations, but was himself unsure how he wanted to proceed. The consular elections were coming up and Flaminius, like so many of his predecessors was worried about some newbie sweeping in and stealing all his glory. He intentionally dragged out the talks, waiting to hear from his allies in the senate whether his command in Greece would be renewed or given to someone else. If the senate ordered the new consul for the year to take over Flaminius planned to cut a quick peace with Philip and return a

hero. If he was kept on as proconsul, however, he would end talks and plan for a new campaign the next year. He made all kinds of excuses to explain the slow pace of negotiations and even advised Philip to send envoys directly to Rome to speed things along. However, it was all to buy time and soon enough Flaminius got the word that the senate had decided to allow him to continue to lead the war against Philip. Flaminius ended negotiations and prepared his army for battle.

Battle of Cynoscephalae — 197 BC

Philip, nonplussed at the whole affair, acquired 25,000 mercenaries in an attempt to match the growing Roman allied force, which now included the full support of the Aetolian

League, the collection of cities that had proved so troublesome to Philip during the First Macedonian War. With more than 30,000 troops the Romans met Philip and his army at Cynoscephalae in 197 BC. What followed was not just the decisive battle of the war, but one of the most important turning points in the history of the western world. The waxing of Rome and the waning of Greece was confirmed that day as the maniple system of the Roman legions devastated the Macedonian phalanx. It was one thing for Rome to defeat other Italians, Gauls, Spaniards and North Africans, but Greece had been the home of the premier military powers of the ancient world. Alexander the Great, Sparta, the Athenian navy were all ahead of their time and irresistible forces on the battlefield. It was unthinkable for the Greeks to lose in battle to foreigners, and yet at the end of the day, Rome stood triumphant and Greek liberty, despite Flaminius's clever propaganda was snuffed out once and for all.

While the Roman maniple was based on the phalanx, they had modified it so that it was more maneuverable, versatile and allow for independent lines of attack (view [Chapter 14](#) for details). All of these advantages would come into play at Cynoscephalae.

The battle itself came about by accident. In 197, Flaminius marched north from Thebes into Macedonian territory looking for Philip. The two armies encountered each other and fought a brief skirmish, but each pulled out to re-position and find better ground to fight. By sheer luck, both armies headed to the same area looking for provisions, but the Cynoscephalae hills divided them and the two armies were unaware of each other's presence. The next morning some of Philip's troops become disoriented in an early fog and marched over the hills. The Romans noticed this sudden appearance by the enemy and Flaminius ordered some of his cavalry, Numidians provided by Rome's new friend Masinissa, to pursue the Macedonians. The cavalry stumbled across Philip's main force and Flaminius ordered 2000 troops to press an attack on Philip's camp forcing the Macedonians to withdraw into the hills *en masse*. After driving off the Roman expeditionary force, Philip ordered his troops to come down from the hill and line up in the rigid phalanx battle line.

Flaminius had by this time lined up his own troops and led the Roman left personally against the Macedonian right, which was led by Philip. The Macedonian right, with the high ground in their favor, was more than a match for Flaminius. However, the Macedonian left found it difficult to line up on the broken ground and the Roman right was able to smash through the line before it was formed. At this point an unnamed Roman officer, on his own initiative, ordered a group of maniples under his command to wheel around and attack the rear of Philip's army. Trapped in their phalanx, the Macedonians were unable to turn to face this new threat and as soon as the new Roman force hit, the battle turned from equal battle into a slaughter. Philip was able slip away but his army suffered severe casualties.

The Roman maniples, which formed more quickly on rough terrain and were capable of independent action proved superior to the Greek phalanx, which was only effective on flat terrain and even then only if given enough time to form properly. Furthermore, once a phalanx was flanked, it was extremely vulnerable. The structural advantage of the Roman maniple system was the decisive element of the battle, which in time would come to symbolize more than just a tactical victory, but mark a critical turning point in history.

Greek “Freedom”

In a clever move born out of necessity Flaminius announced that the Roman legions would not garrison Greece. Greece was free he declared, much to the relieved ears of the Greeks. The truth was that the Romans had not the men nor the money to occupy Greece but the Romans sold the absence of an occupying army in the loftiest moral terms. The Greeks, proud of their historical liberty, were more than happy to go along with the Roman story and thanked Flaminius for setting them free. It would prove to be a peculiar form of freedom as the Romans had no intention of just allowing the Greeks to go off and do whatever they wanted. To the Romans, a freed slave still had obligations to his former master. The Greeks thought they really were free and chafed under the Roman demands for tribute. The tension between the allegedly free Greeks and the Romans would soon lead to conflict and after 50 years of sporadic fighting, Greece was incorporated as a collection of provinces.

The honeymoon period did not last long. Disillusioned with the Romans and having been denied territorial concessions during the peace negotiations, the Aetolian League would call upon the last defender of Hellenistic power, Antiochus the Great to enter Greece and free them from the Romans. The war with Antiochus would draw the Romans further east, where they would meet their most terrifying enemy, one which they thought they had already dispatched — Hannibal the Great and Terrible.

Chapter 25

The Syrian War

192 – 188 BC

At the end of the Second Macedonian war, Gaius Flaminius had declared Greece free from foreign interference, to the great joy of the proud Greeks. However, it was a peculiar form of freedom as Flaminius did not seem to count Rome amongst the foreign powers Greece was free from. Soon enough the Greeks would begin to look sideways at their “liberators,” who were fast becoming “occupiers.” A Greek faction, tired of the Roman presence would look across the Aegean to the only other power in the Mediterranean who could possibly expel the Romans: the Seleucid Empire of Syria, led by Antiochus the Great.

Trouble began in 195 BC, the year after Flaminius’s declaration. The Aetolian League, the collection of cities that had been Rome’s first allies in Greece, felt they had not received the rewards they deserved for helping Rome. Their aid had been given with the assumption that once they helped clear out Macedon, the Aetolian League would be handed control of Greece with Rome withdrawing. However, Roman magnanimity at the bargaining table had left the existing power structure in place, granting the Aetolians no more control than they had prior to the wars against Philip.

Rome was well aware of the Aetolian grievances and was also well aware that the Aetolians were entering negotiations with Sparta to form an alliance that could then offer itself to Antiochus if the Syrian king agreed to launch an anti-Roman offensive. Hoping to preempt an alliance Flaminius led a force against Sparta and easily overran the outnumbered Spartans. The move was a tactical victory in the sense that it forestalled an Aetolian-Spartan alliance, but strategically it backfired, turning Greek public opinion against Rome. If Greece was free, why was a Roman army attacking Sparta? What was a Roman army doing in Greece in the first place? The public relations crisis only ballooned from there. Friends of Rome in Greece became an endangered species.

The Greatest Generals in History

At the same time that Rome moved against Sparta, envoys, including the leading citizen of his day, Scipio Africanus, were sent to Antiochus in Syria to convince him to keep out of Greece. The Roman delegates announced their policy of Greek freedom and ordered Antiochus to stay on his side of the Hellespont. Antiochus was amused by these demands, pointing out that if Greece was so free, what were the Romans doing there? It was a fair point that the Romans had no real answer for. Antiochus sent the delegation away, telling them flatly that Romans demands regarding Greece were as absurd as Antiochus dictating policy to the Romans in Italy. They would each do well to mind their own business.

However, before the cordial visit passed into open antagonism, Antiochus greeted the Romans with all the honors due a visiting power. Present also, as a guest of Antiochus, was Hannibal the scourge of Rome now living in exile. In one of the most interesting face-to-face meetings of the ancient world and depicted in Appian's *The Roman History*, Scipio and Hannibal found themselves present at a banquet together. Scipio, perhaps needling Hannibal a bit, asked the Carthaginian casually who he thought were the greatest generals in history. Hannibal replied that he placed Alexander first, a choice Scipio heartily seconded. Next Hannibal, needling the Romans back announced that Pyrrhus was his choice for second greatest general of all time — pointing out his succession of victories against the Romans. Hannibal then boldly announced that he put himself third on the list. Scipio was preparing for the satisfaction of Hannibal acknowledging Scipio as his better and was shocked at the choice. How could Hannibal claim he was better than a man who had beaten him? As a way of reminding Hannibal of the outcome at Zama he asked Hannibal: "Where would you stand if you had actually defeated me?" Hannibal, realizing that he had offended Scipio, diplomatically replied that had he beaten Scipio he would place himself even above Alexander. A backhanded acknowledgment that beating Scipio would have indeed been a major accomplishment, but that the Roman general did not merit a place amongst the very best of all time. Scipio nursed his wounded ego, no doubt, by remembering that he was dining with the king of Syria as the leading representative of a great power while Hannibal was dining as little more than a beggar. Who's the best general now, sucker?

Antiochus Enters Greece

At the conclusion of the meeting between Syria and Rome, the two powers were at loggerheads with both sides being goaded by their allies in Greece to begin hostilities. The Aetolians were begging Antiochus to drive the Romans out of Greece and the kingdom of Pergamum was egging Rome into attacking their neighbor Antiochus. Hannibal told the Syrian king he would gladly lead an invasion of Italy himself if given the troops and supplies. No direct confrontation was forthcoming, however, so the Aetolians decided to press the issue by launching simultaneous attacks on three Roman-allied Greek cities, each of which would serve as a safe port of entry for any Syrian army. They were repulsed in two of the cities, but welcomed by the citizens of Demetrias who had tired of the Roman presence.

This action, coupled with the fact that the Romans were showing signs of stepping back from Greece convinced Antiochus that the time was ripe for an invasion. He gathered 10,000 troops and sailed for Demetrias. When he arrived, however, two facts immediately became apparent. First, the Aetolians had painted a somewhat misleading picture of the reception Antiochus would receive. Greeted not as a welcome liberator, Antiochus was treated as just another foreign invader and found the gates of the Greek cities closed to his army. Secondly, Roman interest in Greece was waning only insofar as no other power stepped into the vacuum. The arrival of the Syrians triggered an immediate Roman response. Two legions were mustered and sailed for Epirus where they landed and began to march against the Syrians who were camped on the Aegean coast. At the same time, the Achaean League, a rival confederation of the Aetolians, declared for Rome and joined the legions. Antiochus and his 10,000 men were now facing an army that had grown to more than double their size.

The Battle of Thermopylae — 191 BC

Knowing he had miscalculated but unwilling to simply run for it, Antiochus looked around for a nearby spot where the clear numerical superiority of the Romans would be negated, and settled on the most famous bottleneck in history: Thermopylae. Thermopylae was the pass where 300 Spartans had stood against the full might of the Persian army, so 10,000 vs 20,000 should be reasonably good odds. Except that the Syrians were not the Spartans and the Romans were not Persians and everyone now knew that there were ways of getting around the narrow pass. It may have looked good on paper but when the Romans arrived, the remake of the Battle of Thermopylae had none of the luster of the original. The Roman victory was quick and decisive. Antiochus fled back across the Hellespont and the Romans, smelling blood, came fast on his heels.

The one lasting legacy of this Battle of Thermopylae was the entrance of Cato the Elder onto history's stage. Cato would dominate Roman politics for the next 50 years and made a name for himself by leading the charge around the rear of the Syrian army that proved to be the critical maneuver of the battle. Cato, the great conservative of his time, would be the leading defender of old Roman virtue and find himself constantly at odds with Scipio Africanus who represented the modern Roman, Hellenized and worldly. Cato fought a losing battle against the evolution of the Roman character but was idolized by future generations who longed for the simple stoicism of a now largely mythical golden age they held in contrast to the modern, corrupt state in which they lived.

The Romans in Asia Minor

In 190 BC, adopting a clearly aggressive stance toward Antiochus, the Romans elected as consul Lucius Scipio, the brother of Scipio Africanus and sent the two brothers to Greece to pursue what policies they would. The Scipiones, notoriously bold, did not waste time and took their army across the Hellespont, leading the Romans into Asia Minor for the first time.

At the same time, Hannibal, who had for reasons of court jealousy been left out of Antiochus's general staff, was relegated to commanding a small fleet of ships engaged with the Roman ally, Rhodes, off the coast of Asia Minor. The great commander, whose talents were clearly wasted, was unable to pry victory from the jaws of defeat and found himself routed by the Rhodesian navy. Who knows what would have happened if Antiochus had allowed Hannibal to lead his forces into Greece or placed him at the head of the army that was about to be easily crushed by the Scipio brothers. Maybe Roman inertia would have been too much to overcome, but then again maybe the Carthaginian general could have played a role keeping the Romans bottled up in the west. Certainly leaving Hannibal out of the main theater of war didn't serve Antiochus well.

The Battle of Magnesia — 190 BC

The decisive battle came at Magnesia on the border between Pergamum and Syria in modern Turkey, where Antiochus had gathered 70,000 Syrian and mercenary troops. Against this force marched 50,000 Italians and a mixture of Greek allies. The numerical superiority of the Syrians was easily offset by the far greater talent of the Romans. The under trained Syrians lacked the professionalism of the Romans and the outcome of the battle was never in doubt. Antiochus's army was crushed and the disparity between the two supposedly equal powers was thrown out into the open. With a victorious and practically unscathed Roman army standing triumphant deep in Asia Minor, the truth became apparent — Rome had no equal in the Mediterranean.

The terms Rome laid at the feet of Antiochus were harsh. A huge cash payment was demanded, hostages of the ruling families were taken back to Rome and the Syrian king agreed to never cross the Taurus Mountains which stood between Anatolia and the mainland Middle East. The range became the *de facto* frontier of the rapidly expanding Roman Empire. Though Greece and Asia Minor would not be incorporated as official provinces for years, Roman rule in the region was never again in doubt. It was a Roman World. The Greeks just lived in it.

Scipio's Ungrateful Fatherland

The outcome of the war seems like it should have been another feather in the cap of Scipio, but instead it became the source of a great bitterness that would affect the Roman general for the rest of his life. Upon returning to Rome, the Scipio brothers were accused by Cato and his allies of misappropriating war funds. While not denying the charges, Scipio asked if any one present was dissatisfied with the fact that Rome was making back five times what it had put into the war because of the indemnity Antiochus had agreed to. The brothers were off the hook for a while, but charges were raised again five years later. In an example of poor planning, the charges against Scipio were brought on the anniversary of the Battle of Zama (202 BC) and public support for Scipio was at an all time high. He was never convicted of anything but the affairs left a bad taste in the great general's mouth. Retiring to an estate in Campania, he died in 183 BC. The epitaph of his tomb allegedly read: "Ungrateful fatherland, you will not even have my bones." He never did deny the charges though.

In the next chapter Rome will face *déjà vu* all over again. After the deaths of Philip V and Antiochus the Great their sons would pick up the mantle and challenge the Romans in the field. Having not yet felt the sting of defeat, the brash young kings would soon enough find themselves as beaten and demoralized as their fathers. Fighting Rome was nothing if not a blow to the ego.

Chapter 26

The Third Macedonian War

172 – 168 BC

Having soundly beaten Macedon and Syria, the last two major powers in the east, Rome was now the dominant force in the Mediterranean — a distinction it would hold for the next 700 years. In the years after the Syrian War, the Romans were wrapped up with Gallic revolts in the Po valley and persistent unrest in Spain. Though these territories had been officially conquered by Rome, the Romans found it as difficult to maintain their position in these territories as it had been to establish it in the first place.

For the most part these were mere skirmishes in the wider scope of Mediterranean politics. The real center of attention remained Greece where, as in Spain and Gaul, conquering was not the same as keeping. The Romans had demonstrated the superiority of their arms and even the superiority of their diplomacy but the fiercely independent Greeks would never passively stand by while a foreign power held power over them. Rome had its allies, most notably the Kingdom of Pergamum in Asia Minor, but the majority of Greeks bristled at the presence of the barbarians from the west. Factions of nobles in most of the important cities constantly schemed to carve as much autonomy as they could with an eye on eventually throwing off the Roman yoke. Greece was, after all, the greatest civilization on earth, surely Roman rule was merely temporary and it was just a matter of time before the Greeks would retake their place as the leaders of civilization.

Macedonian Dynastic Politics

In Macedon, Philip V had been put squarely in his place and for all his pride and ambition, he was able to do little about his sorry state after being defeated at Cynoscephalae (197 BC). Though he hated Rome, he was a broken man who could not muster the energy for a full-scale revolt. That task would be left to his son, who would return the bravado and swagger to Macedon and renew the quest to drive the Italians from Greece.

Philip V's death in 179 BC was, by all accounts directly related to a quarrel between his two sons Perseus and Demetrius. After the peace between Macedonia and Rome, young Demetrius, Philip's second son, had been sent to Rome as a hostage. Years spent in the city had left the young prince with a pro-Roman worldview. Perseus feared that the political leanings of his younger brother would become manifest upon their father's death: that Rome would engineer a coup and Perseus would be denied his rightful throne while Demetrius would rule a puppet kingdom for Rome. So, when Demetrius returned to Macedonia in 180 BC, Perseus moved quickly against him, convincing Philip that Demetrius was guilty of treason and was plotting with Rome to install himself as king. Philip allowed himself to be swayed and reluctantly ordered the execution of his son. Despite his belief that he had no choice, Philip never recovered from Demetrius's death and within a year the old king was dead.

This left Perseus in control and Rome concerned about its eastern flank. The Macedonian king kept testing Roman patience, clearly violating the treaty his father had signed by taking control of neighboring territory outside Macedon proper and opening diplomatic relations with the Greek political syndicates. Most worrying to Rome was that Perseus arranged a marriage to the daughter of Seleucus IV who had succeeded his father Antiochus the Great as king of Syria. The Romans hoped for the best and being weary of war and unwilling to embrace a belligerent stance, the senate turned a blind eye to Perseus's actions. While the familial alliance between the two Greek powers was a cause for concern in the senate, it was even more so for the Kingdom of Pergamum, Rome's steadfast ally whose territory bordered both Syria and Macedonia. Envoys from Pergamum began to send dispatches detailing Perseus's outrages and offenses, begging Rome to do something about the young upstart Macedonian king. Rome ignored the threat for as long as it could, but finally Illyria began to rise in revolt against Rome and the common belief was that Perseus was behind the violence. That, coupled with an assassination attempt against the King of Pergamum, sealed the deal for the Romans

and in 172 BC legions were sent back across the Adriatic.

Another War in the East

At first the Romans simply moved into Illyria to quell the uprising and stood on the border of Macedon, but a year later war was officially declared and the legions headed into Macedon under the command of Licinius Crassus — an ancestor of the famous triumvir, who would join with Julius Caesar and Pompey in their fatal three way alliance a century later. This Crassus did not get his family legacy off to a good start and promptly led the Romans to their first defeat in Greece. It was a minor engagement to be sure, but the propaganda value of the loss was a boon to Perseus. Greek leaders that had kept their distance from an open conflict with Rome began to support Macedon. It was a decision that would haunt the lot of them and would do away with any pretense of freedom they had enjoyed.

After direct confrontation with the Macedonians proved to be more difficult than the Romans had expected, the next two years saw the Roman army in the east turn toward more profitable and less dangerous pursuits — the plunder of defenseless Greek towns. The consuls in charge during these two years seem to have had little ability or desire to control their men and the legions became little more than a highly efficient band of marauders. A great deal of wealth, plunder and slaves were hauled back to Rome. Everyone profited, so discipline went out the window. This, coupled with the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of Perseus, turned even more Greeks against Rome. There was little to be gained by sticking with the Romans now that the Italian barbarians had no interest in governing, just ransacking the countryside.

Aemilius Paullus

In 168 BC the new consul for the year was Aemilius Paullus, the son of the Paullus who had tried to halt the Battle of Cannae (216 BC) before it happened and then died leading his troops into the massacre. More disciplined than the previous consuls, Paullus the younger immediately restored a sense of purpose to the troops, reminding them that they were there to fight as soldiers against an army not steal from innocent Greeks, who were after all, nominally under Roman protection. Paullus located the army of Perseus and announced his intention to attack the Macedonian army and defeat it.

Perseus was well positioned with 40,000 troops on the Aegean coast and dislodging him would take some doing. Paullus ordered one of his generals to take a section of the army and make a lot of noise approaching Perseus from the north. This maneuver convinced the Macedonians that the main Roman advance would follow and turned his attention north. However as soon as darkness fell the Roman expeditionary force kept right on walking and swung around behind the Greeks. Only the timely intervention of a Roman deserter alerted Perseus to the danger. A contingent of 12,000 Greeks was sent to block the Romans coming from the south, but they were driven back in disarray. Realizing he was being encircled and unsure of where the rest of the Romans actually were Perseus broke north from his fortified position and set himself up near the village of Pydna where the open flat country would ensure the proper deployment of his phalanx.

Having flushed out his prey, Paullus recombined his force and marched to meet Perseus. After spending the night camped across the plain from each other the two armies rose the next morning eager for a fight. According to legend Paullus, facing east, stalled his deployment until the afternoon when the sun would be in the eyes of the Macedonians. Whether this is true or not is a matter of debate, but it is true that the battle did not start until the afternoon and despite the evenly matched sizes of the two armies things quickly got away from Perseus. His phalanx pushed the Romans back but also pushed them onto the uneven hills bordering the plain. The phalanx began to splinter and the Romans were able to send individual maniples through the breaks in the Macedonian line and not so much flank the Macedonians as break them up from the inside out. The Macedonian left disintegrated and Perseus fled with his cavalry. Of the 40,000 or so Greeks in the Macedonian army at least 25,000 died at Pydna while the Romans lost perhaps 1000 men. About 5000 Greeks were captured along with Perseus himself. Where his father had managed to

negotiate a peace that left him in control of Macedon, Perseus received no such favors. The young king was paraded through Rome in chains at Paullus's triumph and then banished to exile in a small Italian village where he lived a miserable existence and died in obscurity. And he showed such promise.

The defeat at Pydna marked the end of the Macedonian kingdom whose territory under Alexander the Great had extended all the way to India. The Senate broke the kingdom up into four republics which were forbidden to trade directly with one another or any other Greek city. All economic activity had to be brokered by Rome. This ensured that no undue consolidation of riches or power occurred and that the Romans would never have to deal with trouble in Macedon again. Weak and divided the Macedonians would attempt one last effort for independence years later, but that would merely present the Romans with an opportunity to officially incorporate the territory into the province of Macedonia.

The Sack of Epirus — 167 BC

On the return to Rome, Paullus, who had done so much to end the senseless pillaging of the legions, led his army on one of the great sadistic rampages of the ancient world. Passing through Epirus, the Romans, furious at the Greeks in general for turning on Rome decided to make an example to prevent future treachery. They chose Epirus because it was convenient, even though the locals had nothing to do really with Perseus or his war against the Romans. At first Paullus implied that if he was paid off Epirus would be spared, and the 70 or so towns collected as much as they could and handed it willingly to the Romans. However, the minute he had collected it all Paullus simply let his men off their leashes and let them sack, rape, plunder and burn anyone and anything they came across. Over 150,000 locals were bound up and sold into slavery. The rest were killed or left destitute and homeless. It was a harsh lesson for the Greeks, harsher still for relatively innocent Epirus. After driving off Philip and proclaiming freedom for Greece, the Romans were universally loved by the Greeks. Now, 30 years later that love was gone, replaced with fear. Machiavelli's point that it is better to be feared than loved is supported by the Roman experience in Greece. While loved, the Romans dealt constantly with backstabbing and conspiracies to do away with them. Feared, the Romans ruled in peace unchallenged. There is no accounting for the horror and immorality on display in Epirus, but the cold fact remains that it worked. Future Greeks knew what the wrath of Rome meant and they wanted no part of it. Better to drink wine and tutor the Romans in math and philosophy and hope they become civilized than attempt to cross swords with them.

Polybius and the History of Rome

One of other legacies left to us by the Roman victory in the Third Macedonian War was the transportation of a great number of Greek hostages to Rome including a young scholar named Polybius. Taken in by the family of Aemilius Paulus, Polybius would become the instructor of Paullus's son, Scipio Aemilianus who grew to be one of the most famous and influential of all Roman statesman and really, the last of great political figure who was not connected with the crises that would consume the republic in the next century.

In an attempt to explain to his fellow Greeks who the Romans were and where they came from, Polybius wrote a massive history of Rome, which exists largely intact today and stands as one of the pillars of our own understanding of the Romans. The histories of Polybius have been an integral part of our very own History of Rome and we owe him a great debt for his excellent work.

Next we will return for the last time to Carthage and Macedon. The two great enemies who had consumed the Romans for the last century were beaten. However, for Rome it was not be enough to simply beat their enemies, those enemies had to be crushed. Cato the Elder made a point of ending every speech before the senate, whatever the topic, be it garbage collection or loan repayment with the line: "Furthermore, it is my opinion that Carthage must be destroyed." Cato, like many of his countrymen, feared the return of Carthage and so set out to annihilate once and for all their nemesis from Africa and quite literally sow their fields with salt.

Chapter 27

Mopping Up

149 – 146 BC

For the last hundred years Rome had been consumed by two major theaters of war: North Africa and Greece. The struggles against Carthage and Macedon had become intergenerational affairs and now the grandsons and great-grandsons of the men who had initially declared the wars donned their armor to finally finish the job. The years just after 150 BC would mark the end of resistance on both fronts.

In Greece a pretender to the Macedonian throne would openly court conflict, whereas in North Africa the Carthaginians did everything they could to prevent another war with Rome. In both cases though the results would be the same and in the watershed year of 146 BC both Carthage and the great Greek city of Corinth would burn to the ground after being lit by Roman torches. There would be no more mistaking who ruled the Mediterranean. In that year the Roman Empire was truly born.

Andriscus's Rebellion

In the years leading up to 146, Greece, the dominant focus of Rome for the last 50 years, still existed in a state of relative independence. The Romans did not wish to garrison the whole country and hoped that the example made of Epirus would instill a self-control in the Greeks that would leave the Romans free from military involvement in the east. It was not to be however. The dream of Greek freedom burnt as bright as ever, forcing the Romans to conclude that there could be no half measures in Greece.

Trouble began in 150 BC when a pretender to the Macedonian throne named Andriscus appeared with the intention of reuniting Macedon and throwing the Romans out. He claimed to be the son of the vanquished Perseus and grandson of Philip V — the last great king of Macedon. Without a strong Roman military presence in Greece, Andriscus followed the path of his putative father and started to push the boundaries of Roman patience.

At the end of the Third Macedonian War, the country had been divided into four republics, economically and politically cut off from one another. Andriscus worked secretly to reunite the territories and began forming an army to deal with the inevitable Roman response. However, with efforts in his home territory moving slowly, Andriscus took what soldiers he had, marched south and conquered Thessaly. Returning to Macedon with some momentum he was able to unite the four republics under his banner.

Crushing the Rebellion

Rome did not look kindly on this and sent a force to deal with the revolt, but the Romans underestimated the resistance they would face and the Macedonians repelled the small expeditionary army. Andriscus started to feel more confident of his position but his success was only possible due to the Roman senate's lack of interest and ineffectual response. Reports of the Macedonian victory changed all that and a new army was sent, this one at full strength and under the command of a brilliant general named Quintus Metellus. That Metellus would soon be called Quintus Metellus Macedonicus should tell you that Andriscus's luck was not long for the world.

Metellus marched into Macedon and crushed Andriscus and the Macedonians without much effort. Whatever steam the Macedonians had been building proved to be just that — a lot of hot air and they proved an easy battle for a committed Roman army. The pretender was driven off and captured — sharing the fate of his supposed father — paraded through Rome at Metellus's triumph.

The senate finally decided that their hands-off approach to Macedon wasn't working and in 146 BC Macedon along with Epirus were incorporated into the Roman Empire as official provinces, the first extension of Roman sovereignty into Greece.

Sack of Corinth — 146 BC

Not long after the Macedonians were pacified, another flare of Greek defiance was fired off, this time from Corinth — the leading city of the Achaean League. Metellus was recalled to Rome to receive his triumph and his place Consul Lucius Mummius was sent to command the Greek forces. In a brutal display of power, Corinth was besieged, overcome and burned to the ground. The men were slaughtered and the women and children sold into slavery. The razing of Corinth marked the total ascension of Roman power in Greece. In a few years the territory would join Macedonia and Epirus as a full Roman province. Greek freedom was dead issue.

The Recovery of Carthage

Running concurrently to the events in Greece and one of the principal reasons for the initially indifferent response to Macedonia's agitation was the last act of the great struggle with Carthage. Unlike the Greeks, however, the Carthaginians were simply minding their own business when the Roman senate decided Carthage must be destroyed.

After the Battle of Zama (202 BC), the war party in Carthage was ousted from power, exemplified by the exile of Hannibal. The Carthaginians at heart were merchants and traders — prosecuting endless wars of empire was not really in their genetic makeup. The period after the Second Punic War was, for the Carthaginians a return to their true calling — making lots of money. Forced by Rome to dissolve its army, Carthage found its ledgers now free of an enormous expense. The money was invested in more productive endeavors, endeavors producing a monetary return. Soon Carthage was riding high, economically at least, which filled the Romans with a mixture of envy and dread.

Unwilling to relieve the Carthaginians of their debt and the subservience that came with it, the Romans rejected offers for the war indemnity to be paid in one lump sum. The Carthaginian senate kept trying to bribe the Romans with free shipments of grain, but Rome insisted on paying for all goods that arrived from Carthage so as not to appear in any way indebted to the Carthaginians.

During these years, the dominant political power in North Africa had become Numidia, led by the loyal Roman ally Masinissa, who had been with them since the final days of the Second Punic War. In the decades after Zama, Masinissa had led the Numidians into Carthaginian territory numerous times and peeled off more and more land with each invasion. The Romans were officially neutral, but had no problem with the Numidian king taking Carthaginian land. By the 150s BC, however, Carthaginian appeasement of Roman power had once again become a hot issue. The Carthaginians were supposed to have retained their North African holdings under the terms of the peace treaty and Rome was supposed to act as the protector of those terms. However, Rome was allowing the Numidians to run amok and had no intention of looking out for Carthaginian interests. So the peace party in Carthage was ousted in favor of a more aggressive faction. The new party did not advocate war with Rome, they merely sought to raise an army to defend Carthage — which was a violation of the peace terms, but Rome had already violated the terms by not protecting Carthage from attack. Furthermore, the last installments of

the indemnity had been sent to Rome and many in Carthage believed this released them of any further obligations.

In 151 BC the Numidians crossed once again into Carthaginian territory and laid siege to a border city. Carthage raised an army of 25,000 to defend the city. However, after 50 years of peace, it would have mattered little if they had raised 500,000. The 25,000 green recruits were easily crushed by the seasoned Numidians and the Carthaginians did little more than provide the Romans with an excuse to destroy them once and for all.

Carthage Must Be Destroyed

When word came that a Carthaginian army had taken the field, Cato the Elder and his cohorts persuaded the senate that Carthage was once again on the rise and would remain forever a threat to Rome if it was not completely destroyed. The senate agreed and in 149 BC ordered a massive invasion force of 80,000 to North Africa. When they arrived, the Carthaginians attempted at once to come to terms, but Roman demands were too harsh. They demanded that the Carthaginians abandon their city and move no less than 10 miles inland. Astonished by this insane demand, the Carthaginian envoys rejected the terms. Once again, just as in the First Punic War (264-241 BC), Carthaginian envoys failed to give up. This time, Xanthippus would not be around to come to the rescue.

The Romans were all set to take the city by force, but disease devastated the legions so much that the Romans had to settle for a siege. Two years passed in inconclusive misery for both sides when the senate realized the mistake they had made. Clearly the fact that the only Roman general who had ever been successful in Africa was a Scipio meant that they needed to appoint a Scipio to head the legions — so they elected as consul Scipio Aemilianus, by blood the son of Paullus who had defeated Perseus in the Third Macedonian War, but by adoption the grandson of Scipio Africanus.

Scipio Aemilianus only further cemented the Roman superstition that only Scipios could emerge victorious from Africa. Arriving near the end of 147 BC, Scipio immediately blockaded the harbor and laid waste to the countryside. By spring 146 BC, the Carthaginians were at their wits' end. However, again Roman terms began and ended with the abandonment of the city, and so, despite their desperate situation the Carthaginians continued to resist. Finally, Scipio ordered a full attack and the walls were breached. What followed was six days of intense street fighting as the Carthaginians forced the Romans to fight for every block. The overmatched Carthaginians were eventually pushed back into their citadel and the Romans ran loose in the city. By this point, of the 700,000 citizens of Carthage only about 50,000 remained. Everyone was either dead, enslaved or had fled. The great city was in its death throes. Finally, the citadel was breached and the last Carthaginians were captured or killed.

Against his own wishes, but acting on the senate's instructions, Scipio set fire to the city, which according to legend took ten days to burn. Survivors, of whom there were too many to take back to Rome as slaves, were forced to live with the mandate they had fought so

hard against. Carthage was not to be rebuilt and no settlements were allowed within 10 miles of the coast. The days of life as a vital hub of Mediterranean trade were at an end. It was a life of meager subsistence for the descendants of a power that had once upon a time nearly destroyed the Roman Empire. According to further legend the Romans then plowed the fields around Carthage with salt so that nothing could ever grow there again. The story only emerged in later years, so it is doubtful it actually happened, but the account gained widespread acceptance and served as a cautionary tale for future generations. Along with the burning of Corinth, the destruction of Carthage was forever offered as a possible scenario to people who resisted Rome. These are not idle threats, the Romans would remind their enemies—this is our history. Now where would you like us to stick the garrison?

The Birth of the Roman Empire

With overseas provinces sprouting up all over the place — in Sicily, Spain, Africa and Greece, the Roman Empire as we think of it was beginning to form into its recognizable shape. The destruction of Carthage and pacification of Greece meant there were no powers left to challenge Rome's dominance. Tribes in Spain would harass the Romans endlessly and Gallic hordes remained a constant threat, but for the most part, the hard part of winning the Empire had been completed.

It is at this point, in 146 BC, that the Romans lost a critical unifying force: a worthy opponent. From this point forward Roman competitiveness and ambition began to turn inward — and many of its leading citizens began looking for enemies within the empire, not beyond it. In the years after 146, Rome would be consumed with internal strife, from the class conflicts egged on by the Gracchi brothers, to the revolt of the Italian allies, to the civil war between Marius and Sulla and then the greater civil war between the Caesars and the senate, Roman history would return to the Italian peninsula after years abroad.

There will of course be excursions back to Africa and into Gaul with Julius Caesar, but the long period of a unified Roman people holding fast against foreign threats is at an end.

In the next chapter we return to the city and take stock of what Rome's successes have meant for her people. How were the plebeians faring? How much land did the great landowners own? Was the Senate a representative body at all anymore or had it become a law unto itself? Rome was now rich and powerful, to what lengths would men go for a piece of it? What was the result of the massive influx of slave labor into Italy?*

So strap into your seats, because the next hundred years are going to be quite a roller-coaster.

Chapter 28

Taking Stock

For 350 years, the Roman republic had grown, contracted, survived and thrived. Through it all, the Romans never turned on their most basic founding principle: no king shall reign in Rome. Every year men stood for election, and every year free ballots were cast by free citizens. The winners won, the losers lost and power was transferred peacefully between them. At no point did great and ambitious leaders step outside the bounds of the system to seize control of the state. It is a remarkable run and the republic's record was and is the cause of much justifiable envy.

However, the Romans, for all their strength on the battlefield and their moral rectitude could not stem the tide of greed and ambition that lurks in the hearts of men in all times and places. Roman success would be the undoing of the Roman Republic and after the symbolic dual sacking of Carthage and Corinth in 146 BC, the dam holding back the dark side began to crack visibly. Less than a century later the dam would break and in defiance of all that had once been held good and true by the Romans, a single man would ascend to the throne of power. Although he was wise enough not to call himself king, we all know that a rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.

The Price of Victory

For all these years the republic had survived for two major reasons: the lower class plebeians had not been so impoverished that they were driven to violent revolution to improve their material situation and the upper class was unified enough that their internal rivalries did not spill out into the public sphere. Both of these critical linchpins were about to be removed leaving civil war and violent class conflict as the order of the day. Both linchpins were pulled simultaneously by one event — victory overseas.

The Romans, in addition to the entire peninsula of Italy now controlled Sicily, Sardinia, North Africa, Greece, Macedon, and Spain. All those subject lands provided the Romans with huge riches, thousands of slaves and endless opportunities for personal enrichment. One might imagine that with such abundance flooding into Rome there would be far less internal conflict not more. There was more than enough to go around, so what would be the point of squabbling? The problem though was that all that new wealth was winding up in the hands of the wealthy elites and some became so rich that, in effect, they considered the cohesion of the state less important than they had in the past. When you are completely self-financed, there is a tendency to follow your own whims and everyone else be damned. Which is no way to keep a republic running smoothly. The ruling class, which had for all these centuries understood that patrician solidarity kept them firmly in charge, started to see men break off to make their own way in the world — forcing the others to compete or lose what status they had. Things quickly spiraled out of control.

To some extent, it can all be traced back to Scipio Africanus. The longhaired, flamboyant, irreverently religious hero of the Second Punic War (218-202 BC) set an example for ambitious young Romans to follow. Indeed, it was Scipio who originally coined the term *imperator* when his troops hailed him as a king after his victories in Spain. He, like Augustus, was sensible enough to distance himself from all talk of monarchy — but the cult of personality he encouraged set the tone for future threats to the republic. After he was dispatched to the east to deal with Antiochus, Scipio also showed later Roman leaders how to form independent power bases and finance a good old fashion power grab.

Client-Patron Networks

In former years, class struggles in Rome were never manifested on strict economic lines because of the entrenchment of the client-patron model of civic relations. All Scipio did was transfer this model to Roman dealings with other nations.

In Rome wealthy Roman patricians offered all manner of services to their poorer fellow citizens, most notably loans and legal representation. In exchange for this aid, the citizen reciprocated by backing their patrons in elections and showering them with public support any time the patron required it. It may seem a minor thing, but in Rome much rested on a man's ability to turn out favorable crowds if he ever came under political or judicial attack. The client-patron relationships endured through generations and wound up providing many of the social services we now ask of the state- the equivalent of health care, welfare and old age pensions. These bonds were strong enough to bind families to voting against their own immediate interest in favor of their patron's chosen policy. Not to jump ahead, but when a conflict between rival patrons heated up, each had an army ready to fight blindly for their man.

Scipio extended this principle to his overseas dealings, leaving behind him a wake of noble families in Spain, North Africa and Greece personally loyal to him rather than to the Roman state *per se*. Indeed, it was the source of all his trouble with Cato after the Scipiones returned from the east having defeated Antiochus. Scipio had granted favors to the Syrian king in exchange for certain monetary tribute, which on the one hand was obviously bribery, but on the other, it was simply an extension of the client-patron model. Could a patron deny his client a favor? Flaminius, after pacifying Greece, took the same attitude and soon Roman aristocrats stationed overseas began to cultivate complex networks of foreign clients, which brought enormous prestige to the Roman aristocrat in question. Slowly but surely patricians stationed in the provinces began to outpace their fellow elites in wealth, power and fame. Almost overnight, the game had changed. Other patricians were forced to keep up with the Joneses or risk being left behind and competition was fierce for the critical overseas appointments that afforded this newfound source of status.

Cato and his faction were extremely aware of the danger this posed to the state. If some patricians became more equal than others then the cohesion of the ruling class would disintegrate and they would all end up poorer men at the end of the day. It may even lead, horror of

horrors, to the plebeians taking advantage of the situation and imposing reforms on a divided ruling class. Sumptuary laws were even passed making ostentatious displays of wealth a crime. It was an attempt to erect a superficial façade strong enough to cut the dangerous competition for riches to a minimum, but it was nearly impossible to enforce and everyone knew how much everyone was making anyway — no law about what material your toga was made of would make any difference.

So on the one hand, Rome's emergence as the dominant political force in the Mediterranean would have disastrous consequences for the old order. Too much money went to the heads of too many young men and immediate personal ambition took the place of long-term political stability. On the other hand, it also had disastrous consequences for the average Roman in the street, or in the field.

Rising Economic Inequality

The backbone of the republic had always been the citizen farmer-soldier. The man who owned enough land to meet the property requirements for service in the legion — who would fight or farm depending on the what his country asked him to do. However, after conquering half the known world, these citizen soldiers came home to find that Italy had been transformed and that they had been left out in the economic cold. Another instance of the pursuit of immediate self-interest at the expense of long-term political stability sprang from the now massively wealthy patricians. In the years after the conquest of Greece, the large landowners began to buy up neighboring farms, sometimes the smallholders sold willingly, sometimes they were “persuaded,” but the result was that more and more land was owned by fewer and fewer families. Of course, large estates were nothing new to Rome, but even if the title was held by some patrician, he needed free men to till the earth and if it wasn’t quite as satisfying a life, at least a poor farmer could get along. However, that was all about to change.

After sweeping through Spain, Africa and Greece, the legions brought home with them slaves. Slaves by the thousands, then the tens of thousands, then the hundreds of thousands. Suddenly the large estate owners did not need free Roman citizens for the planting or the harvest, or really for anything. Now slaves ran the farms, tilled the soil and carried the bushels. The profit margins were outrageous — how could a sensible patrician pass up the opportunity? Besides, his rival in the senate was doing the same thing, so Senator Smith just had to keep up with Senator Jones. It was not outsourcing so much as insourcing. The jobs stayed right where they were, it was the people who were forced to leave. Suddenly once fine upstanding members of the community were landless, homeless and growing desperate. Most migrated to the cities where they hoped to learn a trade or to the provinces where they attempted to become traders, or if they were lucky, secure a small holding abroad. The pressure this put on Roman society was intense. Certainly a few sold their farms for a hefty profit and found a new line of work, but most simply fell on hard times. The Roman economy, which had once been merely supplemented by slave labor, was now a slave economy and the free citizen struggled to stay afloat.

Effect on the Legions

One of the most important consequences this had for the republic was the makeup of its army. I will talk more about this when we get to the episodes on Marius, but the property requirements that men had to meet in order to be enrolled in the legions were fast becoming unattainable. If the requirements were what they had been in Camillus's time, the Romans would be marching out an army consisting of a dozen or so young nobles. Out of necessity, the requirements were lowered and lowered again to keep the legions at full strength. However, with more and more families pushed off the land, it was difficult to keep up. Finally, around 100 BC the property requirements were eliminated and the recruiting offices were thrown open to any man who wished to join. Of course, the soldier, lacking any other means of enrichment would have to be paid, and pay was dependent on his commander's ability to secure booty. If a commander was really good at seizing booty, there were thousands of morally flexible, armed Romans who would flock to his banner. This wasn't about leaving behind the plow to fight for the family plot anymore. This was mercenary work in the guise of a state policy. It did not take long for the façade to fall away.

The properties that had bound the Roman Republic together were coming unglued. The senate, which had risen to political pre-eminence during the long years of the Second Punic War, was deaf to the ill winds that were blowing. Each senator was caught up in his own quest for personal glory: "What cash crop should I plant this year? Sure, famine is beginning to rear its ugly head, but I hear olives are fetching a fine price in Athens. Besides, I need to make enough to ensure my son gets that quaestorship and the wheels need to be greased a little, if you know what I mean."

The ruling class was consumed with this kind of thinking, little realizing that it was all about to come crashing down on their heads. The problem was that the republic had stopped functioning as a republic and had passed into a true oligarchy. However, the people had not forgotten what they once had, and were fast becoming desperate enough to use any means necessary to get a piece of the pie back. The slow slide from oligarchy into tyranny truly began when some of the nobles began to realize that all they had to do was promise the masses a piece of that pie and they themselves could have the whole world.

Chapter 29

Tiberius Gracchus

With the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC, Rome transitioned from what we now call the middle republican period into the late republican period. The late republican period was a time of intense turmoil, leading to the final demise of the republic and the rise of the Imperium. The first key steps in this long process were made by Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus.

Tiberius was born in 168 BC to Tiberius Gracchus the Elder and Cornelia Africana. His father was a well-respected member of the ruling elite. Though a plebeian by birth, by this time the distinction between patrician and plebeian was less important than it had been in the past — and the elder Gracchus was an upstanding defender of the old order. Over the course of his career, he was tribune of the plebeians, censor and twice consul. When he was tribune, he took sides with Scipio Africanus during the political battle over the great general's actions in the east and played a decisive role in securing an acquittal. In gratitude for this loyalty, Gracchus was given one of Scipio's daughters, Cornelia, in marriage. The match was unusual for the age difference, Gracchus at this point was 45 and Cornelia only 18 and also for the fact there seemed to be genuine affection between them, something that was usually lacking from the political marriages of the upper class.

Gracchus the elder died in 154 BC when young Tiberius was only 14. However, the father had spent his life in service to Rome and had rarely been present at the family estate. The education of the boy as well as his brothers and sisters was overseen by Cornelia, who in later years would be honored as the living embodiment of the true Roman woman — the dutiful daughter of Rome's greatest general, the wife of a consul and mother of two of the most famous politicians in history. Her frugality and sense of honor and familial duty were lauded for years and in time she passed from being a living person into a legend similar to a virgin Mary for later Romans. She had three children survive into adulthood — Tiberius, his younger brother Gaius and their sister Sempronia who would wed Scipio Aemilianus, sacker of Carthage and the dominant political force of his day. It is not an understatement to say that this particular nuclear family may be the most politically connected in Roman history.

Early Career and the Numantine Affair

The career of Tiberius Junior began in Carthage where he was attached to the staff of his brother-in-law (who was also his uncle by way of adoption) Scipio Aemilianus. According to legend, Tiberius was the first man over the walls of Carthage when the city finally fell to Rome. It goes without saying that this story maybe an embellishment created later by Tiberius's political supporters.

After serving in North Africa Tiberius was stationed in Spain, which had yet to be incorporated as an official Roman province. Spain was one of the first territories beyond Italy that the Romans conquered, but was one of the last to be pacified and incorporated into the Roman Empire. During this particular period, the 130s BC, there was trouble around Numantia and Tiberius served in the legions dispatched to put down the revolt. The resulting campaign was a complete disaster however and in 137 BC, 20,000 Roman soldiers were captured. Tiberius brokered a deal with the Numantians to secure the freedom of the legionaries, but when the terms were brought back, the senate rejected them out of hand issuing a public rebuke of Tiberius for the dishonorable treaty he had brokered. Critically, the call to reject the treaty came from Scipio Aemilianus, making the rejection personal and embittering.

The incident was an early indication of the fracturing cohesion among the Romans that began to take place after the sacking of Carthage and Corinth in 146 BC. Although a plebeian, Gracchus was clearly closely tied to the patricians. However, after the stern questioning of his honor by the senate, Tiberius broke from his colleagues and began to look to the people for political support. He was followed by others in the ruling party, who began to look for ways to exalt themselves above and beyond the senate by directly appealing to the will of the people. This was the early splintering of Rome into the familiar and famous political parties the *optimates* and the *populares*. The optimates represented the old oligarchic supremacy of the senate while the populares supported reforms that would strip disproportionate wealth and power from the elites.

While it would be easy to look upon the populares as the heroes of republican history during the civil wars, it was the optimates, Cicero among them, who, were the defenders of the republic, while the populares advocated for Caesar. However, for all their platitudes about republican virtue, the optimates were interested merely in protecting their own position not about protecting republicanism *per se*. Defenders of freedom and liberty were everywhere in word and

nowhere in deed during the final century of the Republic.

Tribune of the Plebs — 133 BC

For the next five years, Tiberius watched the lot of the Roman people go from bad to worse. Their farms were being bought up, slaves were taking their jobs and a revolt in Sicily had brought critical grain importation to a standstill. All of this left the average Roman desperate and impoverished — and it left Tiberius Gracchus with a golden political opportunity.

In 133 BC, he stood for election as one of the 10 plebeian tribunes for the year. Upon election he embarked on one of the most ambitious and controversial tenures in Roman history — it probably would have been the most ambitious and controversial tenure in Roman history had it not been for his brother's even more ambitious and even more controversial tenure a decade later.

The Lex Agraria

At the heart of Tiberius's popularity was his call for extensive agrarian reform. With all the eloquence his upper class education afforded him, Gracchus made common cause with the disenfranchised farmer. Large estates continued to grow, and with them the number of disenfranchised and impoverished farmers who were forced off the land. Tiberius proposed to put a cap on the amount of land a man could own. The proposal was wildly popular with the people, but how would Tiberius ever get the measure passed by the senate who not only hated the bill but also the man who proposed it?

Tiberius side-stepped this problem with a solution that only further enraged the senate — he would simply bypass them. There was nothing in the law that said measures proposed in the people's assemblies had to be brought to the senate for approval, it had just been a longstanding working custom. So when Tiberius was elected tribune he simply made his pitch to the people and figured the rest would take care of itself.

Senatorial Opposition

Unfortunately for Gracchus though, any of his tribunate colleagues could veto the measure — and this was a law not merely a custom. So the senate tapped an ally, a tribune named Octavius, who vetoed the measure. No amount of fist pumping or hand wringing or demagoguery could change the immutable fact that if another tribune vetoed a proposal. It was a dead issue. Tiberius moved that Octavius be voted out of office.^[1] Having removed Octavius from office, Tiberius's land reforms were passed by the people's assembly. However, the move alienated many of Tiberius's supporters who thought he had behaved unconstitutionally.

Those who stayed loyal to Tiberius, were nonetheless worried about his treatment of Octavius. A tribune was, and had been since the inception of the office, sacrosanct. There was no law or precedent for removing a tribune and Tiberius's arguments that if a tribune failed to protect the people and follow their will then the people had the right to remove him were not entirely persuasive. Although Tiberius had succeeded by underhand methods to pass his agrarian reforms, he was nonetheless stymied by any lack of financial provision to implement them. Tiberius had expected the senate to provide the funds as was the custom but the senate offered only a small sum which was clearly inadequate for purchasing land back from the large landowners. Tiberius then took things one step further and announced he was going to veto everything until he was granted the means to implement his law. Even the most trivial measure was cut off without debate, including the daily opening of public places (such as markets) which was overseen by the tribunes. Tiberius brought Rome to a complete standstill.

The Agrarian Commission

The senate, seeing the ease with which Tiberius had been able to push his legislation through, despite opposition from a fellow tribune, and wishing to get the business of business moving again, allowed the reform bill to pass. A three-member commission was established to oversee the redistribution of land consisting of Tiberius, his younger brother Gaius and, seemingly inexplicably, Appius Claudius. Tiberius had married his daughter and in one of history's strange twists this Appius Claudius did not join the family business of defending patrician rights with his every word and deed. The three sat down and began doling out land.

They turned first to land in Italy that had been held by soldiers who had been killed in battle. Supposedly, that land was to revert to the state, but enterprising senators had been occupying the unclaimed plots. The agrarian commission set about breaking the plots up and redistributing them. It is estimated that roughly 75,000 new farms were created in that year. Unfortunately, lacking a proper budget, the entire endeavor was marked by inefficiency, confusion and yes, corruption.

The Bequest of King Attalus III

Soon enough the question of Italian land went on the back burner to an even hotter question. King Attalus III of Pergamum, nephew of the longtime Roman ally during the Macedonian Wars, Attalus II, died in 133 BC and sensing that a dynastic struggle and inevitable Roman conquest would follow, the king willed Pergamum, what is today western Turkey, to the Roman people. The windfall was greeted by cheers in Rome but pretty soon the question arose as to what exactly the king had meant. The senate assumed that as responsible stewards of the state the land fell under their jurisdiction and would be parceled out and governed by the consuls and proconsuls of the ruling class. Tiberius and his allies, however, read the endowment literally and argued that Pergamum had been left to the people of Rome and therefore fell under the purvey of the agrarian commission. Rome was in the midst of a land crisis and had been handed the answer to all its problems. Settlements for everyone!

However, by again taking his proposals directly to the people and bypassing the senate — Tiberius was playing with fire. The enmity between the senate and Tiberius was deeply personal at this point. It is impossible to know which policies were pursued because they were thought best and which were pursued simply to poke the other side in the eye.

Re-Election

The senate, incensed, knew that the wisest course of action would be to simply wait. Tiberius's year in office would soon be up and once the shield of sacrosanctity was lifted, they would have their revenge. It was common knowledge that men were lining up around the block with charges they planned to file against Tiberius the moment he stepped down. Tiberius, recognizing that he may have gone too far too fast and with much too heavy of a hand decided to go double or nothing and announced he was running for re-election. This was in clear violation of the proscribed annual term limit, but Tiberius pushed ahead — arguing that if the people's assembly saw fit to return him for another year, who was anyone to deny them that right?

Murder of Tiberius

This was the last straw for a small cabal of nobles who decided that it was time for Tiberius to go. Led by Tiberius's own cousin and Octavius, the deposed tribune, a group of armed patricians descended on a public rally for Tiberius and ordered the people to disperse and cease their support for an illegal candidate. These calculated, fighting words did their work and a fight broke out. In the ensuing riot, Tiberius was targeted and clubbed to death.

When told of the death of his brother-in-law, Scipio Aemilianus reportedly quoted the *Odyssey*, saying "So perish all who do the like again."

Tiberius Gracchus had gotten the late republic off the ground with a bang. His extremism re-energized class struggles that had been dormant for centuries. The reactionary patricians, wrapped up in their personal disdain for Tiberius the man, failed to see that he fronted a reform movement that had more than its fair share of legitimate grievances. Much of the time they failed to even pay lip service to the suffering of the common Roman family and succeeded merely in engendering further divisions. In their stubborn refusal to let go of the old order, they practically guaranteed it would be smashed apart. On Tiberius's head, however, was the subsequent wholesale abandonment by ambitious politicians of longstanding traditions that had bound the state together. The removal of the tribune Octavius was an unprecedented move and, for better or worse, laid bare before Rome the reality that their laws and traditions were just words and that they could be broken with impunity if supported by a loud enough mob. The sacrosanctity of the tribunate went back all the way to the secession of the plebeians in the first generation of the republic. If such a long-standing tradition could be cast aside in the name of political expediency — what did the Republic really have to stand on? It left the Romans without any guidelines, markers, rules or boundaries. The next century would unfold as little more than a political free for all. Power was everyone's ultimate objective and might, henceforth, was the sole decider of right.

Chapter 30

Gaius Gracchus

Tiberius Gracchus's extreme populism helped kick-start a century of civil strife that would be the republic's undoing. This is not to say the Tiberius was to blame for the downward spiral, but he certainly staked out a position that forced the senate to stake out a reactionary counter position — and it was this polarization, not one side or the other necessarily, that eventually led the Roman people to the safe and comforting arms of Caesar Augustus.

Hot on the heels of the number one summer blockbuster *Tiberius Gracchus: Man of the People*, came the sequel *Gaius: Revenge of the Gracchi*. Like all good sequels they took what made the original work, doubled the special effects budget and quadrupled the size of the crises. If protagonist Tiberius had to save the city, Gaius would be tasked with saving the whole world. When Tiberius entered office, he focused on the single issue of agrarian reform and met his downfall running for an illegal second term. His brother would pick up the baton on agrarian reform but also added a whole slate of other populist reform measures. Where Tiberius failed to win his second term Gaius succeeded and met his own downfall seeking an unprecedented third term. The sequel always has to be bigger, better and go further than the original. It's just good marketing.

Early Career

Gaius was born in 154 BC, the same year his father died so where Tiberius at least had some contact with his father, Gaius was raised entirely by their mother. He was destined to live his life in the footsteps of his brother, who was 14 years his elder. The entire career of Gaius Gracchus was defined by the path his brother had cut through the wilderness. It was a combination of family obligation and personal revenge that drove Gaius to press his ambitious reform platform — for the most part the younger Gracchus did not have much choice. The supporters of Tiberius and the legions of clients that had built up around the family expected him to carry on the legacy and Gaius simply could not turn away from those expectations.

Gaius even began his career in similar fashion to his brother, attached to the staff of his much older brother-in-law Scipio Aemilianus. He served in Numantia, though he was not there at the time of the campaign that so changed Tiberius's life. Tiberius was driven to his extreme populism because of a very public rebuking by the senate, whereas Gaius was driven by the very public murder of his brother by those same senators. His brother's death left him the patriarch of the wealthy and influential Gracchus family, though at least for a few years Gaius did attempt to pull back from a public career, declining to run for office immediately he came of age. However, he couldn't avoid the pressure to follow in the footsteps of his brother, father, grandfather and ancestors in every direction. Gaius was marked for a public career and there was nothing he could do about it.

In 126 BC he was elected quaestor and was assigned by lot to a post in Sardinia and by all accounts served as an able administrator. However, it was on the island that Gaius found himself becoming personally embittered toward the senate in his own right — not just for real and perceived slights against his family, but slights directed at him personally. As quaestor Gaius served under Consul Lucius Orestes — and in Roman tradition if a consul was kept on in a certain territory, becoming a proconsul, then his officers stayed with him. In Rome, political class tensions continued to simmer after the death of Tiberius and the senate was keen to keep Tiberius's younger brother out of the city while they undid all his work. So they voted to keep Orestes stationed in Sardinia and Gaius was forced to stay as well. Another year passed and the senate voted to keep Orestes on again. Gaius began to feel that the senate was doing this on purpose, so when it again voted Orestes proconsul for Sardinia, Gaius announced he was returning to Rome and would not be staying on. There was nothing

illegal about leaving, but it was completely unheard of. A Gracchus managed again to turn a binding cultural norm into so much hot air.

He returned to Rome and in 123 BC was elected tribune of the plebeians like his father and brother before him. The sources differ as to whether Gaius entered office with a revolutionary slate of proposals in hand or whether his platform grew organically as a response to circumstance. What is not disputed is that by the time he left office almost every aspect of Roman society had been touched by one or another of his proposed reforms.

First Term — 123 BC

He began innocuously enough, addressing an issue that has been in our own headlines recently — skyrocketing grain prices. Though the slave revolt in Sicily had been put down, a plague of locusts had swept through North Africa and there was a general shortage of grain coming into Rome. The city's inhabitants, swollen with poor and landless families, faced outrageous markups on basic food staples. The conditions that caused the shortages were real enough, but merchants were having a field day — taking full advantage of the panic in the streets. Gaius simply pushed through a cap on the price of grain. Essentially the Roman state began to bring in grain and sell it at far below the inflated market rate. This transferred the burden of the price spike off the backs of the poor city dwellers and onto the collective back of the state. The senate was by no means pleased at Gaius's ingenious plan to invert basic economic common sense — buying high and selling low, but it did solve a pressing social concern and the people loved it, so there was only so much the elites felt they could do. In Gaius's grain plan we find the seeds of the later food welfare program that became so important during the Imperium, but for now at least the Roman state merely provided food at a normal price, and was not yet handing it out free.

With the people now fully behind him Gaius turned to settling old family scores — he passed a measure making it a crime to re-stand for the tribunate if the assembly voted to remove an officer from power. Gaius wanted to be clear that standing in the way of popular will was the shortest route to complete irrelevance, while at the same time he wanted to legitimize Tiberius's recall vote of Octavius 10 years before, which had a very shaky legal foundation at the time. Gaius also passed a measure making it a crime to hand down capital punishment without the approval of the assembly. This measure was aimed directly at an ex-consul name Laenas who had overseen the trials and executions of many of Tiberius's associates in 132 BC after the elder Gracchus was killed. Gaius's new law contained the provision that it applied retroactively and Laenas was forced into exile for an act that was only later determined to be a crime. In most countries today these kind of *ex post facto* (“after the fact”) laws are explicitly prohibited as being an obvious cause of mischief.

Old scores settled, Gaius returned to the source of all his brother's popularity — agrarian reform. The Agrarian Commission which had been rendered impotent in 129 BC was re-booted and the process of identifying illegally held land and redistributing it was taken up again in earnest. Gaius followed this with laws on military service.

Henceforth no one under 17 was to be drafted and limits were put on the total number of years of service required. In another important step in the evolution of the army, Gracchus demanded that the state provide soldiers with adequate clothing. During his time in Sardinia, he had witnessed first-hand, conscripted legionaries freezing and miserable from a lack of proper supplies. It was a necessary provision to deal with real suffering but it was another step on the road to the fully state funded armies that would tear the country apart in the years to come.

Rounding out his first year in office Gaius worked to reform the law courts, opening up the jury pool beyond the senatorial class that had long held the strings of justice and creating a commission to investigate charges of bribery, a rampant problem that had been ignored for years. It had been a remarkable year and Gaius's popularity was at an all-time high. Because of this popularity Gaius was able, through no fault of his own, to succeed where his brother had failed and win another term in office. He had not even actively campaigned, but the assembly had failed to grant a majority to 10 Tribunes, so the final slots were appointed by those tribunes who had won a majority and they named Gaius, who though he had not sought the office, eagerly accepted their appointment.

Second Term — 122 BC

In his second term, Gaius brought to the table one of the thorniest issues of the day and dropped it right in the middle of an already chaotic political environment. The question was on the rights of non-Roman Italians and specifically, whether they would be made full citizens. One of Gaius's fellow tribunes was a former consul named Marcus Fulvius Flaccus who had championed Italian citizenship in 125 BC. It was, in fact Fulvius's proposal that had inspired the senate to keep Gracchus in Sardinia. Italian citizenship was an idea whose time had come, but the senate still balked at the idea of extending full rights to non-Romans. One of their greatest fears was that if they allowed populist reformers like Gracchus and Fulvius to bring the vote to the Italians, they would be rewarded with thousands and thousands of new clients ready to vote any way the tribunes directed them. It was an irrational fear, as many of the Italians were feeling the brunt of the Agrarian Commission's redistribution efforts and had no great love for Gracchus, but the conservatives in the senate began to see bogeymen around every corner.

Gaius worked on other issues in addition to the citizenship proposal, shoring up the treasury by increasing the efficiency of provincial tax collection and attempting to release some of the population pressures on the city by establishing colonies overseas. In total Gaius's year and half or so in office had seen him touch almost every aspect of the social order and universally acting in opposition to whatever the conservatives in the senate wanted. Near the end of his second term, Gaius sailed for Carthage where one of his proposed colonies was being built. While he was gone his voice and charisma left with him and his enemies began to openly plot the downfall of the troublesome tribune.

When Gaius returned he found his allies had one by one been turned against him and that all of his reforms were threatened by outright repeal. The only option Gaius felt he had available to him was to tempt fate and do the only thing more unthinkable than serving as tribune for two terms — serving for three terms. This time though his support amongst the non-senatorial elites was at an all-time low — as a mixture of bribes and threats had done their work. Gracchus was forced to fully embrace the persona of 'man of the people' and hope that he would be able to drum up enough votes to win. He moved from his estate on the Palatine Hill down into a local slum and began, with the help of his Greek speechwriters, to launch into full throated populist campaign mode. He even went so far as to tear down a set of risers from which the wealthy would view an

upcoming gladiatorial match because they blocked the view of the commoners. However, despite his desperate campaign, Gracchus was defeated at the polls. There were of course accusations of fraud and we will never know whether Gracchus actually won or not, but officially he was out and the new tribunes to a man were enemies of Gracchus, set about to dismantle all his reforms.

Mob Violence and Suicide

Gracchus and his colleague Fulvius made the fateful decision to muster a series of public demonstrations against repeal that took on increasingly violent and seditious overtones. At one of these gatherings a herald of Gracchus's chief opponent was killed by overzealous Gracchus supporters. As soon as the body hit the ground Gaius knew he was undone. The tribunate did not waste time leaping from a murder charge against the men responsible to full-blown charges of treason against Gaius and Fulvius. The two were immediately named enemies of the state and were forced to run. Fulvius was caught and murdered along with his two sons, while Gaius fled with one of his slaves. Cornered and knowing that capture meant only disgrace followed by execution decided to skip the former and ordered his loyal slave to perform the latter. A murder-suicide later and they were both dead and, just like that the Gracchi, who had so dominated politics for the last decade were gone.

Impact of the Gracchi

Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus left an indelible mark on Rome and changed the character of its society forever. Whatever the hopes of their political opponents, the Gracchian reforms could not simply be undone. It would take too much violence to remove citizens from their newly created farms and besides the negative press would be far too much to overcome. Of all his proposals the only one to truly die was the matter of Italian citizenship. That would not be tabled for another 30 years and would require a full blown revolt before the Italian allies were treated as equals within the state. In this revolt the ghost of the Samnite Wars would return with a vengeance as they would be leaders in the violence that led to citizenship. The senate could have saved itself a lot of blood and treasure by simply recognizing the inevitability of extending citizenship, but sometimes things have to get out of hand before the hand finally loosens its grip.

Beyond their legal reforms, the Gracchi led to the introduction of mob violence and mob pressure. Until now, elites had been careful not to empower the masses or hint to them in any way that they far outnumbered their leaders and could, if they wanted, get their way by sheer physical intimidation. It was a lesson well learned by the next generations and the streets of Rome would soon run red with the blood of mobs and counter mobs crashing into one another — egged on by leaders who craved power at any cost. In the next chapter we meet one of those leaders who learned the lessons of the Gracchi all too well, Gaius Marius — and the mark he would leave on the Republic would come to resemble the kiss of death as Julius Caesar would follow his uncle-in-law's^[2] career to its logical conclusion and have himself declared dictator for life.

Chapter 31

Marius

In 121 BC Gaius Gracchus was driven to suicide. Now we take up the career of a man who, coincidentally, served as tribune of the plebs the very next year. He would not make his name in that office or that year, but twenty years later, he would be known to history as the great reformer of the Roman Legions and the man who was consul five times in a row. What the Gracchi had started by flouting the laws against consecutive terms Marius took to a higher office for an even longer stay.

Gaius Marius was born in 157 BC in southern Latium. His hometown had been conquered by the Romans in the fourth century BC and since that time they had been citizens of Rome without voting rights. It wasn't until about 30 years before Marius's birth that his people were granted status as full Roman citizens. The story goes that Marius was the son of simple farmer, but this myth of humble origins was an invention after the fact to help the poor of Rome identify with Marius the great general and politician. His father was certainly involved in farming, but he was likely a major landowner who had numerous family and commercial ties to the nobility in Rome. There is no other way to explain how Marius was able to get his foot in the door to high Roman office.

The other great myth of Marius's early years is that as a teenager he came across an eagle's nest with seven chicks inside. The Romans believed eagles were sacred animals looked after by Jupiter himself. Though again this myth did not begin making the rounds until later — especially after Marius began running for his Seventh consulship and it was impressed upon the people that it had all been pre-ordained by Jupiter himself. Elect Marius! He once saw seven baby eagles and he's only been consul six times. You don't want to go messing with the universe, do you?

Early Military Service

When Marius came of age, he volunteered for service in the army and was placed as an officer. Though this placement hints that his family was well connected, he was never truly accepted by his noble peers. To them he would always be *novus homo* or a new man — meaning that none of his ancestors had ever served as consul. Despite all the power, wealth and fame he acquired over his career, to the old guard he would always be a new man- much the way that in England no matter what Margaret Thatcher did, said, or achieved she will always be just a grocers' daughter to the aristocratic class. Some ceilings simply cannot be broken through. This very status as a new man though would solidify Marius's near sainthood in the eyes of other ambitious young men who could not trace their family trees back to Romulus.

As a young man, Marius was stationed with Scipio Aemilianus, in Numantia — just like our old friends the Gracchi brothers. In 134 BC, he ran for and was elected one of 24 military tribunes for the Spanish legions. He was an unknown candidate but had a stellar service record to present. Unable to trade on his name, Marius traded on his skills and accomplishments — what a concept.

Patronage of the Metelli

This began Marius's slow and sometimes agonizing climb up the Roman political ladder. At each rung he was resisted by the old guard who were never quick to embrace new men — so unlike many other great figures in Roman history, his elections were never a foregone conclusion (unless you count the bit about the seven eagle chicks predicting his seven consulships). He managed to get himself elected quaestor after losing an election for a local magistracy in his hometown. In 120 BC — the year after Gaius Gracchus's turbulent final term in office — Marius was elected a tribune of the plebeians. He was able to do this by securing the blessing of a noble named Quintus Metellus. Though only three years older than Marius, the Marius family had long been clients to the Metellus family and the old client-patron dynamic played out.

Once in office though, Marius infuriated his patron by helping pass an election reform law the Metelli opposed. The bill required a narrowing of the passageways electors walked down on their way to the ballot box to prevent harassment by partisans for one side or the other. The lofty ideals of democracy are often reliant on such micro-management. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance ... over the width of hallways.

His relationship with Metellus strained, Marius's career stalled. However, after a few years he stepped up another rung and managed to get elected praetor — despite charges of ballot fraud. I guess it doesn't matter how narrow a passageway is if the man walking down it is going to cast 50 votes. Marius served in Spain with some distinction for a few years and then returned to Rome where he married the aunt of the yet to be born Julius Caesar. The marriage was a boon for Marius's career and earned him a whole host of new allies amongst the elite and around 110 BC he even patched things up with his old patron Metellus.

At this point, I would like to shift gears before we move into the next stage of Marius's life and give a little background on where he and Metellus were headed.

Jugurtha

In 119 BC, the son of Masinissa, the old Numidian ally of Rome from the Punic Wars, passed away. He left the kingdom to his two sons and a third adopted son, named Jugurtha — who was technically the dead king's nephew. All three were grandsons of the great Masinissa. Jugurtha did not like to play nicely with the other children and immediately set about running the other two out of power. He assassinated one but the other escaped and fled to Rome. Concerned at the power struggle in their client state — and the economic disruptions caused — the Romans sent a delegation to find out what the trouble was.

When he was a young man, Jugurtha served in Spain as a cavalryman alongside the Romans and had noted the most glaring weakness of the legions: the ease with which its commanders could be bribed. Military commanders at this time — no longer fighting for survival but clearly in it for the money — and saw no important distinction between plundering by force and accepting bribes instead. In fact, the latter seemed far more cost effective. Of course, to the Romans the idea of bribery was officially morally reprehensible but this fact had little influence on commanders in the field.

So when the Roman commission came to adjudicate the Civil War in Numidia, Jugurtha bribed them handsomely to decide the issue in his favor — which they promptly did. Left alone and in control of half the kingdom, Jugurtha set about attacking his cousin-brother to win the other half. In this struggle, the Italian merchants and citizens came down almost universally against Jugurtha who was creating problems and disrupting trade. In retaliation, Jugurtha took the provocative step of executing a number of Italians in his custody. The senate could not stand by and let this go on, so they sent an army to deal with the upstart. However, the Roman armies were able to do little against Jugurtha. Suspiciously little. At once, an investigation was undertaken into accusations of bribery and Jugurtha, still technically a client of Rome, was summoned to account for himself. However, a few well-placed bribes later Jugurtha was on his way back to Numidia as free as a bird and no finding of fault was handed down on anyone. You have to hand it to him, there is something poetic about bribing your way out of charges of bribery.

Metellus and Marius in North Africa

However, the Roman people were still up in arms about the barbarian prince and in 109 BC the consul for the year, Marius's old patron Metellus, was sent to Numidia to put down what had become a fully-fledged rebellion. He took along Marius to serve as chief lieutenant.

The campaign of 109 was frustrating for both sides — Metellus was too honest to be bribed, and realizing this, Jugurtha kept to the mountains and away from the invading legions. The Numidians took a page from old Fabius the Delayer and embarked on a war of attrition with the Romans. Metellus was never able to pin the African prince down and his troops and the public back home began to lose patience. Accusations of bribery were hurled at Metellus, and though innocent, his apparent failure became damning evidence.

Campaign for Consulship

Marius watched with frustration equaling that of the Roman people. He thought Metellus far too cautious and began to get the idea that he could do a better job. To curry favor with the troops he relaxed discipline in camp and began letting it be known that if he were in charge this war would be over in a week.

Troops and traders both began to write home praising Marius to the sky and a groundswell of support began to coalesce around the confident lieutenant. Marius asked permission to return home and stand for the consulship. Metellus disapproved of the idea but knew the troops were getting restless and it wouldn't do anyone any good to have Marius sulking around camp stirring up trouble, so the consul let him go.

Marius came back to Rome and campaigned on a platform denouncing the slow pace of Metellus's strategy. He spoke confidently of his plan for victory, which involved aggressive scorched earth tactics. The public, weary of corrupt officials prolonging the war, swept Marius into his first consulship in 107 BC. The senate was not exactly pleased at the do-gooder novus homo who was about to spoil all their fun, and while accepting his election, attempted to deny his appointment to command of the Numidian legions. The people's assembly, however, countered the move by invoking a little used clause that gave them final say over a consul's placement in the field. Marius was given Numidia and tasked simply with following through on his promise to end the war.

Eliminating Property Requirements

To accomplish this goal, Marius asked permission to raise his own legions. This permission was granted — but then Marius asked for an exemption from the rules governing recruitment. The number of men who qualified under the old census rules had dwindled to a bare few, even after the property qualifications had been lowered and lowered again until they practically did not exist.

The army Marius raised for the Numidian campaign, while the logical conclusion of years of rewriting the rules, nonetheless marked a clear break with the past. There would be no property qualification this time. Any citizen was eligible — landholder or not. The floodgates were opened and the poor citizens of Rome flocked to join Marius's new army. The new consul further convinced the state to pay for their clothes, food and weapons.

Though the move was supposed to be a temporary measure that affected only this specific levy, there was no turning back. Henceforth, the ranks of the legions would be filled by the poorest of the poor not the richest of the rich. The elites had grown tired of the burden of military service anyway. They had plush estates and Greek philosophy to read, let the rabble risk their lives in the provinces — it might clear out some of the excess population, and besides, it gave them something to do besides railing against the injustice of their life, which was becoming such a bore. Let the beggars be soldiers. It was a fateful moment that greatly accelerated the path to military dictatorship and Imperium. From here on, poor citizens became career soldiers — promised a salary while they served and a plot of land when they retired. To most, it seemed too good to be true — and in many cases, it was — as the state reneged on land grants and was often slow with the paychecks. Soon enough the interest of the soldiers no longer aligned with the interest of the state and generals who could deliver land and pay gained the loyalty of men who now looked at the senate as bunch of crooked old liars.

Sulla Captures Jugurtha

However, the immediate issue was the war in Numidia. Marius took his newly minted soldiers to Africa and promptly delivered on his promise — though it wasn't scorched earth and brute force that carried the day but a little backroom treachery of his own. After finding it was not as easy to bottle up Jugurtha as he thought, Marius dispatched one of his lieutenants to a neighboring kingdom to convince the local king, the father-in-law of Jugurtha, to betray the rebellious prince. Through a mixture of bribery and cajoling, the young lieutenant was able to pull it off and the king delivered Jugurtha to the Roman delegation in chains, the war in Numidia came to a grinding halt.

Because he held imperium over the war, Marius received all the credit for his lieutenant's actions. There was nothing really improper or unprecedented about this, but it did stick in the craw of the young officer, who Marius often failed to even mention as he described how the war was won. The incident would mark the beginning of a rift between Marius and the young officer, a man named Lucius Cornelius Sulla. That rift would soon open into a chasm and the two men would stand for years on opposite sides of a bitter and often bloody conflict that presaged the full-blown civil wars of the following generation.

However, while Sulla's star was still on the rise, Marius's was burning at its absolute brightest. In no time he would check off baby eagles 2-6 and break every prohibition in the book doing it, serving as consul for an unprecedented five consecutive years. In that time he would fundamentally reshape the organization and composition of the legions, turning them from a part-time army into a fully professional fighting force. All the drilling and conditioning Marius put his armies through was essential as an old menace was rising again in the north. Suddenly the complacent Romans, who had spent the better part of a century fighting wars of choice and conquering the Mediterranean with ease, suddenly found themselves facing a war of extinction. The Gallic nightmare, long dormant, was back with a vengeance and it would take everything the Romans had just to hold them at bay, let alone conquer anything.

The Return of the Gauls

Up to this point Marius's career was impressive — but hardly unique. Because he was a new man he deserves extra credit for forging his way upward despite the institutional barriers he faced but he was hardly the first *novus homo* to be elected consul and hardly the first Roman general to win the support of the Roman people by bringing an unpopular foreign war to an end. However, Marius's ambition, and more importantly his willingness to act on that ambition, set him apart from his colleagues.

In 109 BC when Consul Metellus was sent to Africa and took Marius along with him, his consular colleague Marcus Silanus was sent north to deal with the Cimbri, a Gallic tribe that had been growing in strength. Silanus was supposed to put down the impertinent barbarians and restore Roman order but instead was utterly defeated. Emboldened by the Cimbri's success another Gallic tribe began making waves in 107 BC — the year of Marius's first consulship. Again a Roman army was sent north to put down the marauding army and again the legions were beaten. This time the Roman officers left standing were only able to save their defeated troops by having them pass under the yolk, a humiliating ritual for the proud Romans. At this point, the most pressing matter was the war in North Africa, but it was fast becoming apparent that Rome faced a very real threat in the resurgent Gauls.

In 106 BC, the Romans met with some success when the consul for the year Quintus Caepio pacified a rebellious town and reintroduced the idea of Roman superiority. He would give it all away the next year, however, leading to the circumstances that allowed Marius's unprecedented run of consulships to commence. In 105 BC, Caepio was made proconsul in Gaul and the new consul for the year, Gnaeus Mallius, was sent north with an army to join him. Mallius, like Marius, was a new man and the noble Caepio had little interest in serving with, let alone serving beneath the new consul.

The Cimbri were on the move again and had been joined by another migrating Germanic tribe, the Teutones, on the east side of the Rhone River. Mallius crossed with his army but when he engaged the tribes, Caepio refused to come to his aid. Only after pleading from the senate did Caepio agree to help the consular army. Even then, he refused to join his forces with Mallius's troops. As a result the Cimbri and Teutones turned first on Caepio's smaller force and drove him off, then they swung back on Mallius, who was pushed back to the banks of the river. With nowhere to run and no reinforcements to speak of,

the Romans were crushed with casualties' running up to 80,000. The entire debacle was chalked up in the Roman rumor mills as another example of haughty oligarchs disrespecting anyone who did not come from their closed caste. Caepio would not have left a patrician cousin out in the cold like that — it was only because Mallius was novus homo that so many good Roman sons and husbands were dead on the banks of the Rhone.

Illegal Second Consulship

So in 105 BC, the people turned back to another novus homo — a man who had proven his ability to succeed where the supposed elites endlessly failed — Gaius Marius. The election itself was illegal of course — there were at least two and possibly three different laws placing various restrictions on when a man could be consul, how many years must pass before he holds office again and possibly, whether holding office a second time was ever permissible. However, the laws were flouted and the rule of law gave way to popular sentiment. Marius was stationed in Africa at the time of his election and returned to take up a mantle he had set down just two years before.

Upon his return, he celebrated a triumph for his victory in Africa with the chained Jugurtha at the head of the procession. The spectacle climaxed with the execution of the rebellious African prince. No bribe saved him this time.

Marius's Mules

Marius's first order of business was to whip the legions into shape. The armies sent north had been sloppy and undisciplined. Marius had no intention of repeating the mistakes of his predecessors. He again raised a levy without regard for property qualifications but then took things one step further by reorganizing the basic structure of the army to meet his own specifications. In doing so, he would completely abandon the maniples system and the traditional three lines that had served the army so well over the past 200 years, in favor of a more robust and more mobile legion. The armies of Caesar, Pompey and Octavius were all structured according to the Marian vision.

The first thing Marius did was abolish the maniple as the basic tactical unit. Too often the checkerboard maniples had proven insufficient against a direct frontal assault — furthermore, when not facing a locked down phalanx, it was easy for a single maniple to be surrounded and cut off from the rest of the legions. So Marius took what had once been merely an administrative label for three maniples, the cohort, and made it the basic tactical unit. Now rather than 160 odd men marching off together, the tactical box comprised 400-500 men. While enlarging his tactical forces, Marius also made the decision to abandon the traditional three-line formation.

It really speaks volumes of Marius's self-assuredness that he would so casually shrug off an organizational structure that had conquered most of the known world — some would call it outright arrogance — but all his alterations were made with an eye on the coming battle with the Gauls, a campaign that would involve a lot of headlong charges from a numerically superior force. There was no sense letting the drama of having the inexperienced first line pushed back only to have the veterans waiting in the wings step in and save the day. He eliminated the division of age and mixed old and young into his new cohorts. He then arrayed them in three nominal lines but drilled his troops to rapidly cycle forward, not waiting for one to be pushed back before the other stepped up. The idea was to always keep the freshest troops on the front line, have them fight like mad for a few minutes and then go to the back and let another line step in. Marius would have made great hockey coach.

However, Marius did not stop just with how the army fought, he also changed its entire outlook on what it meant to be a soldier. Previous armies took seriously the responsibility of combat but left the actually packing of equipment to slaves and pack animals. The baggage trains had become unwieldy and the number of camp

followers had grown to ridiculous proportions. With poor men serving year round at his disposal, Marius simply ordered that the troops carry their own equipment. He force-marched them around Italy with 70 pound packs until they gained the strength and stamina to move quickly without worrying about a mile-long donkey train. The nobility derisively referred to the soldiers as Marius's mules but the marching and drilling with oversized packs left Marius's legions in the best shape of any Roman army in history. In sheer stamina they could not be matched and when it came time to fight they could simply outlast an enemy who put all its energy into an initial charge.

Finally, Marius rebranded the army as a lifelong career choice not just a temporary obligation for men with better things to do. He made statutory land grants to men who served their full 20 years of service and regulated dispensations of food, clothing, armor and weapons. Marius also began to actively promote from within, taking the best of his foot soldiers and making them officers when they displayed courage and initiative. These commissions of course came at the expense of the young nobles who had long been accustomed to simply stepping into positions of leadership without any real battlefield experience. The move at once made the army better, made the men love Marius, and annoyed the old patrician order. However, the hurt feelings of the nobility were of no consequence to Marius, and he was single minded in his pursuit of recapturing the glory of the old Roman legions. They had been the best for years but were dangerously close to letting it slip away due to the complacent laziness of the patrician elites. The Gallic armies waiting in the north would not simply lay down their arms because some tenth generation Claudius led the army, and to Marius that was all that mattered.

The Cimbri and Teutones, of course, made many of these reforms possible by simply cooling off their offensive for a few years. The Cimbri had decided to try their luck in Spain while the Teutones laid low in southern Gaul for a few years. Marius was returned for a third consulship in 103 BC to continue his reform efforts and when that term expired - he sought office again, not wanting all his efforts at reshaping the legions to be wasted by some new consul who did not understand all that he was trying to accomplish. Furthermore, he had been preparing for a great showdown with the Gauls and frankly, they were not playing their part very well. Marius had put a lot of effort into building an army that could defeat them and now he wanted the credit and glory he felt he deserved.

The Gauls Finally Invade

In 102 BC, in the midst of his fourth consulship, and third in a row, the barbarian tribes finally obliged and set about planning an invasion of Italy. Though the Cimbri and Teutones combined to form an army a staggering 200,000 men strong, they made a critical error and decided that instead of overwhelming the Romans in a single mass onslaught, they would divide and invade Italy on two fronts. It might have looked good on paper, but it let the outnumbered Romans off a rather large hook. With the barbarian army divided, Marius could focus on one then the other without ever having to face insurmountable odds.

The Cimbri circled around and were set to come into Italy through the Alps from the north-east, while the Teutones were to come in along the Mediterranean coast. Marius sent a force under his consular colleague's direction to delay the Cimbri's passage through the Alps while Marius himself took his new toy into France to head off the Teutones before they even got to the mountains. Further tribal recklessness led to another piece of good luck for Marius. A contingent of 30,000 Germans broke out ahead of the main barbarian army as soon as they caught sight of the Romans. Marius was able to rout this charge with ease and place half a legion behind some nearby hills before withdrawing. The rest of the Teuton army marched forward in pursuit and when they had passed the hidden cohorts, Marius turned and attacked. All their attention forward, the barbarians never saw the 3000 Romans emerge from their hiding place. Unsure of who or what had attacked them from behind, the army became a confused mob, which Marius easily exploited. The Teuton army was annihilated.

Things did not go so smoothly against the Cimbri, however. The other consul for the year had been unable to hold them back and by the end of 102 BC Italy found itself playing the unwilling host to 100,000 barbarian invaders. In the elections that year Marius was again returned — no sense in getting off the horse in mid-stream. In the summer of 101 BC, Marius led the horse safely to the other side of the river, meeting and defeating the much larger barbarian army. All the drilling and marching proved the difference against the far larger but less disciplined hordes. Marius returned to Rome and celebrated his second triumph — he was now at the peak of his power and fame. At this point only Scipio Africanus loomed larger in the Roman imagination than the great Gaius Marius who was now the hero of two separate wars against two completely different enemies. Sure, there was grumbling in the upper classes about this commoner who seemed to be making himself king, but the danger was as real for them as it was for the lower classes, and Marius proved himself more than up to

the tasks he had been assigned.

Fifth Consulship

In gratitude for his success, Marius was made consul for the fifth time in a row in 100 BC. It may have been one consulship too many as some of Marius's popular luster wore off. Grain prices were on the rise again and the tribunes, reading from the Gracchus script, were agitating for relief. Unrest began to ripple through the city and the senate ordered Marius to do something about it. Seeing the immediate expediency of restoring order to Rome, Marius complied, but it pitted him against the popular assemblies who had done so much to lend credibility to his never-ending reign. At the end of the year Marius decided that enough was enough and announced his retirement from public life.

If the story had ended there Marius would have already secured his place in history as one of Rome's greatest and most famous leaders — but it was not to be. The old warhorse was to be pulled out of retirement to deal with the inevitable result of Roman mistreatment of their Italian allies. In what would become known as the Social War, Marius would again fight alongside Sulla — his perennial lieutenant who was now a general in his own right. The Social War would be the last time the two fought on the same side and the intense rivalry between the two men would soon erupt into a bloody back and forth of purges and counter-purges that shocks the conscience even today.

Chapter 32

The Social War

91 – 88 BC

After his final consulship in 100 BC, Gaius Marius retired to a self-imposed exile and it appeared that the great general had left the public stage for good. Ten years of relative peace and quiet followed until in 91 BC Rome was once again threatened by a hostile enemy triggering Marius's return to the familiar territory of war and politics. This time, however, he would not be fighting Numidians or Gauls — instead he would be fighting the very men who helped him defeat the Numidians and Gauls.

The Roman-led Italian Confederacy, which had endured now for hundreds of years and had stood firm even against the clever might of Hannibal Barca whose entire strategy hinged on bringing about its dissolution, was finally breaking apart. The second class status afforded the Italian allies finally became intolerable and rather than making obviously just concessions, the tone deaf Roman senate took a hard line — initiating what has become known as the Social War. A collection of Italians broke away and formed an independent state, complete with a capital and their own senate. After two years the Italians were finally granted their simple request to be treated as equals — but of course those were a bloody two years. The war served no one's interest and should never have started — just another example of unnecessary carnage brought about by shortsighted pig-headedness.

Causes of Italian Discontent

Trouble had been brewing for years. The fight for full Italian citizenship had picked up momentum during the tribunates of the Gracchi brothers, but the senate had always managed to block the extension of suffrage, more concerned with the immediate political expediency of denying the Gracchi and their allies a victory than actually addressing whether the policy was right or wrong. In 91 BC, the flint was sparked again by a tribune named Marcus Drusus. This time the kindling lit and pretty soon a full-scale bonfire was raging.

In the past the confederate arrangement between Rome and the allied Italian cities had served everyone well. The Italians were nominally independent, but were required to provide troops to serve in the legions if Rome required it. In return for their troop levies, the Italians had always shared generously in the spoils of war and found their formal taxes kept to a bare minimum. However, in recent decades, while their commitment increased — by the turn of the first century BC fully 65% of the legions raised were composed of non-Roman Italians, the war booty was increasingly held by the Roman leadership. This began to irk the Italians — but they had no official way to address the situation and had no say in the election of the consuls who had now grown accustomed to giving their allies the shaft. Their attitude grew steadily worse after Marius eliminated the distinction of Roman and non-Roman legions. Indeed, Marius famously stated that in the din of battle he could not tell Roman and ally apart. So here they were literally fighting side by side with the Romans, but taking home an increasingly reduced share of the profits. Many assumed after Marius's reform that citizenship would soon follow, leaving them bitterly disappointed when the senate refused to take up the issue.

Finally in 91 BC, Tribune Marcus Livius Drusus introduced legislation aimed at providing full equality to the Italians. Oddly enough, Drusus was no radical populist. Indeed his legislation was aimed at diminishing the ability of rabble-rousing tribunes to sway the hordes of Rome against the senate which Drusus saw as the true defender of republican virtue. By introducing more level-headed, middle class Italians into the electorate, Drusus hoped to shift power away from populist demagogues who had only the narrow interests of the populace of Rome at heart. The senate didn't pick up on the subtlety of Drusus's proposal, however, and immediately opposed the idea. They were confident in their hold on power and didn't want to introduce an unstable element into the equation. Besides, the Italians might start peeling off some of those riches the senators had been

hording. So, oblivious to their own long-term self-interest, a cabal of patricians conspired to put a stop to Drusus. Firstly, they killed his legislation and then when that didn't work, they simply killed him.

For the Italians watching from the sidelines — this was the final straw. They really thought that this time the senate would listen and Drusus would deliver on his promise to make them equals. The dead tribune's body, however, told them everything they needed to know. The time for drastic action had arrived.

Rebellion

One by one, Italian cities began to openly declare they no longer bore any allegiance to Rome and henceforth would be completely free and independent. At the vanguard of this movement were the Samnites, one of Rome's oldest foes who had never fully gotten over their final defeat some 200 years earlier. In Rome the news was greeted with furious disbelief. To them the issue of who ruled Italy had been solved at the close of the Samnite wars. However, the disbelief did not delay their action and legions were immediately raised to put the upstarts back in their place. However, across Italy, town after town joined with the anti-Roman confederacy. The only region to remain steadfastly in the Roman camp were the Latins — everyone else, it seemed, was going to take their shot at independence. It did not, however, turn out to be a very good shot.

In the city of Corfinium, which lay across the Apennines due east of Rome, representatives of the various Italian cities gathered to formalize their alliance. They renamed Corfinium Italica and declared it to be the seat of a new government based on the Roman model — complete with its own senate and assemblies. The immediate business of the new Italian government was the impending war their very existence had sparked. The Romans were not going to take this rebellion with grace and good humor so preparations had to be made to withstand the inevitable onslaught.

The Romans, quick with the rod, sent their consular armies out in opposite directions in 90 BC, one north and one south to put the revolt down. To the north went Consul Publius Rutilius who coaxed out of retirement his famous relative, Gaius Marius to act as a military advisor. It didn't do much good though, as Rutilius quickly led his army to a series of blundering mistake-prone defeats. Finally, the consul made his one positive contribution to the war effort by getting himself killed. After the consul's death Marius stepped in to the leadership void and quickly had the northern Italians on the run. With the situation in the north for the most part well in hand, the focus of the Romans turned south — where they experienced an unpleasant case of *déjà vu* crossing swords with the dreaded Samnites.

Lucius Julius Caesar, the consul leading the Romans in the south and the elder relative of a 10 year-old boy named Gaius, found the Samnites no less fierce an opponent than when last the two sides met in battle. Caesar along with his fellow commander Lucius Cornelius Sulla watched helplessly as the Samnites sacked a number of Roman towns. However, they were finally able to halt the advance and keep

the Samnites bottled up while Caesar returned to Rome to oversee the consular elections. However, before he left office, Caesar laid the political foundation for the war's end. The senate, understanding now that citizenship was inevitable, passed the Lex Julia granting citizenship to those Italian cities who had not joined the rebellion and offering it to any Italian currently in revolt who laid down his arms. The vast majority of Italians, to whom independence had been unwelcome anyway, jumped at the chance. However, the Samnites and a collection of tribes in the north continued to hold out.

Sulla Promoted, Marius Thwarted

In 89 BC, Sulla was given full command of the southern troops and showed himself to be a brilliant tactician and leader of men. After saving a besieged legion at the city of Nola, Sulla was awarded the grass crown by the grateful soldiers whose lives he had saved. His fame was growing and, to the people of Rome, he emerged as the clear hero of the whole conflict.

This did not sit well with Marius, who had been maneuvered out of his command in the north when the senate, afraid of the old consul returning to the political arena, gave the north over to Caepio, the son of the consul who had left Mallius out to dry in the war with the Gauls. However, when Caepio fell in battle, Marius was sure it meant he was destined to return to Rome the triumphant hero. However, the senate again thwarted him and sent Consul Pompey Strabo, the father of Pompey the Great, north to take command. There was little Marius could do and he was forced to play a subordinate role as Pompey besieged the town of Asculum, which was the last city holding out.

Once Asculum fell the back of the resistance had been broken and the fight went out of the Italians. By this time most of them had already given in, content with the fact that they had achieved exactly what they wanted and would soon be full equals in a united Italy. Sulla wrapped up the last pockets of resistance in the south and the brief Social War was over.

Cicero and Pompey

As a footnote I should mention that during these years a young noble named Cicero was punching the clock on his brief military career in order to qualify for the political career he really wanted — fighting under both Pompey Strabo and Sulla. Cicero had no taste at all for battle and never made any secret that he disliked war. In later life he was given a statue of Mars by a friend to add to his growing collection and Cicero wrote in reply, “Why send me a statue of Mars? You know I am a pacifist.” However, from 90-88 BC young Cicero did what he had to do and slogged around Samnium — knowing no man in Rome could hope to lead without a few war stories to make him credible.

Another young noble who cut his teeth during the Social War was Gnaeus Pompeius — though his attitude toward battle was much more in keeping with the Roman tradition than the bookish Cicero’s. Only seventeen at the time, he was called to action in 89 BC to serve with his father in the north and was presumably present during the siege of Asculum. The young Pompey, if Plutarch is to be believed, already had an air of greatness surrounding him and his fellow troops made comparisons to young Alexander the Great and Scipio Africanus.

Pompey and Cicero had little in common personally, but in 40 years the two men, all grown up and having reached the pinnacle of the political ladder would find themselves on the same side of a bitter Civil War against a man who at the time of the Social War was only 10. I often think that this was about the only time Pompey and Cicero would have proved a match for Julius Caesar — who in his good time, would both outfight Pompey, Rome’s greatest general and out politick Cicero, Rome’s greatest politician. However, how were they supposed to know? By the time Sulla remarked that in the teenage Caesar he saw many a Marius it was probably too late. Remember, sometimes the best way to win is to make sure your opponent is still a child.

The Seeds of Civil War

The Social War was paradoxically both a war of unification and the last time for seventy years the Romans themselves were unified. In 88 BC, just as the Italian allies were being officially enrolled as full Roman citizens, Sulla was elected consul. In itself, it seemed a natural and innocuous choice. He was after all the hero of the most recent war, and who better to lead Rome? Besides, in the east, Mithridates the king of Pontus was hatching the first of his seemingly endless merry-go-rounds with the legions of Rome. Who better to march out to face this new threat than the great Sulla?

Well, according to the aging Marius, Marius was. The old general became convinced that it was his destiny to lead the legions in the east. Unfortunately, he couldn't convince anyone else to back him — and why should they? Sure, he had been great in his prime, but it was a different age and it was becoming clear that Marius was borderline senile and clearly unable to wrap his head around the fact that the world was moving on without him. Sulla was young, dynamic and clearly represented the future of Rome, so he was unanimously chosen to lead the armies headed east. Marius, bitter in defeat decided that rather than go out quietly, he would order his hard core partisans to do everything in their power to reverse the decision and place Marius himself back in charge. Sulla was forced to flee the city and made his way to the encamped legions, most of whom were loyal veterans from the Social War. However, though he briefly held power, Marius's desperate, selfish power-grab triggered a wholly unprecedented response from Sulla — who did not take his eviction well. Word soon reached Marius and his partisans that the aggrieved consul was returning at the head of a full consular army. Sulla, it seemed, was marching on Rome.

Chapter 33

Marius and Sulla

88-84 BC

After emerging as the hero of Social War, Lucius Cornelius Sulla was elected consul in 88 BC. With the brief civil war put to rest, Roman attention was immediately diverted east where Mithridates IV,^[3] king of Pontus, was threatening the newly incorporated province of Asia located on the far side of the Aegean. Trouble had been brewing for a few years and in 88 BC, Mithridates did not simply cross the line, he jumped over it. After several confrontations with the Roman legions garrisoned in the east Mithridates decided that the westerners had to go, and Anatolia should be returned to her native people. To this end, he initiated a mass slaughter that was to become known as the Asiatic Vespers. Enlisting the help of locals in cities across the Turkish peninsula, anyone who so much as spoke with a Latin accent was targeted for death. Over 80,000 Roman citizens and allies were murdered across the east coinciding with an invasion by the king into the Roman province of Asia. The Romans were justifiably horrified and immediately raised an invasion force to avenge the slaughter.

Sulla was the natural choice to lead the invasion, but old Marius had his mind set on one last fling with glory and arranged for the senate's choice of Sulla to be annulled by allies in the people's assemblies. Marius and his allies guaranteed this annulment by having their gladiatorial bodyguards literally throw senators out of the senate so a quorum could not be established. The use of mob violence into Roman politics precipitated by the Gracchi was starting to become less the exception and more the rule.

The First March on Rome

Sulla was forced to flee for his life and made his way to the army encamped on the Adriatic. The army was ready for the planned invasion, but before they sailed east, Sulla would march them west. He incited the troops, most of whom were loyal to Sulla anyway, into a frenzy over Marius's anti-democratic thuggery. Ready to follow Sulla anywhere, the consul pointed them toward Rome and announced that with their help he was going to evict Marius from the city. His officers were appalled by Sulla's actions. It was illegal for the legions to cross the traditional city limits of Rome, and as much as they disapproved of Marius, they simply could not abide Sulla's brazen flouting of the law, which bordered on treason. When they reached the city all but one of Sulla's officers, a close lieutenant named Lucullus, refused to cross the line. Sulla respected their decision but was not dissuaded from his plan and took the troops right into Rome.

Inside the city Marian partisans organized gladiators and slaves into a defense force, but they were no match for Sulla's trained legionaries and in the brief street fighting that ensued, Sulla's army had no trouble turning the defenders to heel. Marius barely escaped with his life and fled, along with his son, to Africa. Sulla restored order to Rome, had Marius declared an enemy of the state and put the senate back in control of the city. All of this drama filled the entirety of Sulla's year as consul and it wasn't until 87 BC that he was actually able to lead his army out of the city to the east where he should have already commenced the retaliatory campaign against Mithridates.

The Marian Terror

However, the minute Sulla left town, Marius began to plot his return. Many in Rome who had been ambivalent in the political showdown between Marius and Sulla had been pushed over to the Marian camp by Sulla's completely illegal and immoral seizure of the city. In 87 BC the people of Rome did themselves no favors if they hoped to keep turmoil in the city to a minimum by electing as co-consuls Gnaeus Octavius, a staunch conservative and Sulla partisan, and Lucius Cornelius Cinna, a populist, who fast becoming the leader of anti-Sulla forces in Rome. While not necessarily pro-Marius, Cinna nonetheless saw an alliance with the old general as an advantageous way to box out Sulla's allies. Throughout 87 Octavius and Cinna clashed repeatedly, until Cinna was driven out of town by an angry mob. Once outside Rome, Cinna immediately began gathering men who would help him fight his way back to power.

Marius, meanwhile, was raising an army in Africa with the intention of following the precedent Sulla had just set by marching on Rome to capture the city. When Marius crossed the short span of the Mediterranean back into Italy at the head of a loyal army Cinna saw an opportunity to strengthen his own position. He formally joined with Marius and the combined forces stormed into Rome. What followed was five straight days of terror and bloodshed. Marius simply released his army inside the city with orders to kill anyone allied with or suspected of allying with or suspected as having the same name as someone who was allied with Sulla. Noble families fled or fought depending on their disposition. Captured Sulla partisans were killed and their heads were displayed in the forum. Finally, after five days of unchecked violence Cinna could stand no more and ordered his troops to put a stop to the outrages committed by Marius's men. The army from Africa was ordered to stand down and those who refused were killed by Cinna's troops.

Order finally restored, elections for next year's consulships were held. That Marius and Cinna were elected came as no surprise to anyone. Anyone who opposed them had either fled or been killed. For Marius the election to his seventh consulship fulfilled the promise of his legendary encounter with the seven eagle chicks so many years before. Satisfied that his destiny had been met, the old general died in 86 BC just two weeks after his election — leaving Cinna in sole control of Rome.

The First Mithridatic War

While all of this drama was unfolding back home, Sulla was off in the east leading the effort to re-pacify Greece. Mithridates had overrun the province of Asia and had made the Greek cities along the Aegean coast his accomplices in the mass murder of Latins in Anatolia. Welcomed as a liberator, the king pressed his luck by going one-step further and attempted to push the Romans out of Greece altogether. In his effort, he was backed by the Armenian kingdom, which was reaching the zenith of its own power. Combined, the two hoped to retake the eastern Mediterranean from the alien westerners. The ensuing war with Rome would have far-reaching consequences. Rather than being pushed back to where they came from, the Romans wound up planting their standards even further from home.

When Sulla crossed over to Epirus in 87 BC, he found that Mithridates was well on his way to turning the Greeks against Rome. In Athens, a puppet tyrant had been installed and was backed by a Pontic army lead by Mithridates's most able general Archelaus. This would be as far west as Mithridates would make it, however, as the mere sight of the 40,000 Roman soldiers led by Sulla was enough to convince the remaining Greek cities to remain loyal. Sulla's first order of business was to bring Athens back into the Roman fold. After the city shut its gates to the Romans, Sulla sat back and laid a siege.

While encamped outside the city, refugees from the Marian reign of terror began to trickle in and Sulla first received the news that Marius had returned to power and that he had been officially exiled from Rome. He maintained his focus on the task at hand, however, and for the rest of the year and through the beginning of 86 BC Sulla remained at the gates of Athens. Finally, in March of 86 BC the vigilance of the Athenian defenders waned and Sulla stormed the walls in a midnight raid. Once inside Sulla was not feeling particularly generous and did nothing to rein in his troops. The slaughter was only halted after Greek friends of Sulla begged him to stop the carnage. The Pontic Army under Archelaus had sailed north and Sulla left Athens to lick its many wounds. On his way out the door, however, Sulla set fire to the Athenian port of Piraeus — a final reminder of what happens to those who stand against Rome.

Sulla caught up with Archelaus north of Athens in the Greek province of Boeotia. The Pontic army by this point numbered 120,000 — three times larger than the Roman legions chasing them. Sulla studiously avoided being drawn into a fight until he found terrain that

would mitigate Archelaus's overwhelming numerical advantage. Finally at Chaeronea, Sulla found his spot. He lured Archelaus into attacking when the Romans held fortified high ground. With Sulla personally dashing from wing to wing to keep up with wave after wave sent by Archelaus, the Romans outlasted the increasingly thin Pontic army. Seeing a chance, Sulla charged and chased the opposing army back to its camp. Encircling the men trying to return to their camp, Sulla spared none. The final casualty figures showed that while the Pontic army had been slaughtered the Romans emerged from the battle practically unscathed.

The Anti-Sulla Legions

With this smashing victory in Greece, Sulla remained as popular as ever with the people of Rome, despite the continuing hostility from the elites left in the city and the fact that he was technically in exile. Cinna was re-elected consul in 85 BC and decided that Sulla needed to be formally relieved of duty — not because there was any doubt he would triumph over Mithridates, but because there was no doubt he would triumph over Mithridates. So Cinna raised an army and placed men with strong anti-Sulla passions in charge. They were to find Sulla, relieve him of his command and combine the two armies. However, when the army lead by Lucius Valerius Flaccus and Gaius Flavius Fimbria arrived and camped beside Sulla's army things went wrong — Sulla encouraged the new arrivals to defect to his side and pretty soon the new army was hemorrhaging troops. Flaccus, unable to make Sulla stand down, led his army north, officially to track down the army Mithridates was leading toward Greece, but unofficially to simply distance himself from Sulla's seductive charisma.

The dissention in the ranks spread by Sulla, however, had soured the remaining troops on Flaccus and his second in command, Fimbria, led a mutiny. Flaccus was murdered and Fimbria took over, but being a staunch Marian partisan, the new leader had no intention of joining with Sulla. He wanted to take Mithridates himself and steal Sulla's thunder.

The End of the War

Sulla himself remained in Boeotia readying himself for the rematch with Archelaus, who was being reinforced from the east, and soon was back at the head of an army again numbering more than 100,000. The two sides met at Orchomenos, but the outcome was no different this time around. The superior tactical ability of Sulla, which was executed by the far more disciplined Roman soldiers, was too much for the Pontic army. Once again Archelaus was forced to make a run for it as Sulla annihilated the army he left behind.

After crossing the Hellespont into Asia Fimbria found Mithridates and fought a limited battle in which Rome got the better of the Pontic king. However, without support from the Roman navy patrolling the Aegean, Fimbria was unable to prevent Mithridates slipping away. The navy, led by Lucullus, Sulla's most loyal officer, was not about to come to the aid of a political enemy. Mithridates could see the handwriting on the wall, however, and in late 85 BC, offered to come to terms with the Romans. The Pontic king met with Sulla, much to Fimbria's dismay, and peace terms were agreed. Mithridates was to remain in control of Pontus, but had to withdraw his forces from every other region he occupied. Rome would move in and occupy these territories, extending Roman dominion even further into the east. The territories that had rebelled and the newly acquired regions were forced to pay a steep price for challenging Rome. Not only was the annual tax burden increased but Sulla demanded five years' worth of back taxes at the same rate. The financial punishment left most of Anatolia deeply in debt and unable to direct their wealth toward any end other than paying back Rome. This, in addition to filling Rome's coffers, kept them from making further mischief.

Sulla Heads Home

With the war against Mithridates settled, Sulla returned to his war against his domestic opponents. Fimbria, who had taken command of the province of Asia, was of immediate concern. The mutinous general talked a good game but as soon as Sulla crossed the Hellespont, Fimbria committed suicide, knowing he was no match for Sulla and would likely be executed one way or the other for his actions. With the east fully pacified Sulla began to strategize about a return to Rome.

Cinna, who had effectively run the city for the past few years unopposed, was well aware that if Sulla came back the party would come to an abrupt end. Taking advantage of some minor commotion in Illyria, Cinna raised an army to quell the unrest. The fact that Illyria lay directly between Sulla and Rome had nothing to do with Cinna's desire to march an army there, of course. In his haste, bordering on panic, to get his army in place Cinna pushed his troops too hard, force marching them through snowdrifts to reach Illyria in time to block Sulla. In one of history's little twists of fate, Cinna's soldiers mutinied and stoned the four-time consul to death. The path to Rome now lay open. On hearing the news, Sulla immediately ordered his troops to head home. Sulla, it seemed was marching on Rome. Again.

Chapter 34

No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy

83 – 78 BC

In 85 BC Sulla won his war in the east against Mithridates and came to terms with the rebellious king. While the war in Asia unfolded, Sulla had been too busy to worry about the fact that technically he was in official exile from Rome, a consequence of his political struggle with the now dead Marius and the soon to be dead Cinna. However, having emerged victorious abroad it was time to turn back to his domestic political problems. Cinna, who had been in sole control of Rome since Marius's death three years earlier knew that Sulla's imminent return did not bode well for his career or his life, so he organized an army to stand between Sulla and Rome. However, in his haste to block Sulla, Cinna pushed his own troops too hard and was murdered in a mutiny in 84 BC. His path back to Italy clear, Sulla led a force of five legions across the Adriatic and landed on the heel of the Italian peninsula.

Consuls Attempt to Defend Italy

Inside Rome, news of Sulla's arrival was met with panic as most of Sulla's supporters had been purged during Marius's and Cinna's reigns, so the state was staffed with fierce Marian partisans. Consequently, the consuls chosen for the year 83 BC were both fierce opponents of Sulla. They were also, as it turned out, no match for him either.

Both consuls raised armies to prevent Sulla from moving north. Gaius Norbanus finished his preparations first and marched quickly, intent on bottling Sulla up in the heel of Italy. However, his army was made of fresh recruits and he himself was not a general anywhere near his rival's class. Sulla blew through Norbanus without breaking a sweat at the Battle of Mt Tifata. The defeated consul was forced to flee with the remainder of his army to Capua. Next, the other consul, Cornelius Asiagenus, marched south at the head of his army to see if he could do any better, but he didn't even get as far as Norbanus did. Upon intercepting Sulla, Asiagenus's army began defecting in droves to Sulla and the consul was forced to surrender without ever drawing his sword.

Sulla's Supporters

For the Roman aristocracy, it was not hard to tell which way the wind was blowing and many nobles who had done their best to ride out the troubles in inconspicuous neutrality now began to openly back Sulla. The governor of Africa, Metellus Pius, a highly respected general in his own right, took it upon himself to throw Marian partisans out of his province and thus deny Sulla's enemies a source of recruits and supplies. Within the city of Rome, however, it was still dangerous to support Sulla and one last round of violence against his allies swept through the city. However, this would prove to be the final death throes of the Marian power structure and soon enough they would find themselves reaping what they had sown.

In addition to Metellus's support in Africa, Sulla also found support in Spain from Marcus Licinius Crassus, who in due course would become the richest man of his time and one of the three triumvirs. Crassus marched an army east to Italy where he planned to help Sulla win control of Rome. The second of the three triumvirs, Pompey the Great, also decided his ambition was best served by throwing his lot in with Sulla, and raising an army of his own, announced his intention to fight for Sulla. The third triumvir, young Julius Caesar, will make his appearance shortly.

Near the end of his term in office, Consul Asiagenus, led a new army against the 23 year old Pompey, who had positioned himself in North Italy. The consul clearly had no wish to relive the embarrassment of losing his army without a fight to the charismatic Sulla. Asiagenus, however, happened to have the misfortune of being a mere leader of men in a time of extremely charismatic leaders and when he reached Pompey wound up in exactly the same boat he had found himself in before. His army defected *en masse* and the consul was once again forced to flee without an army left to lead.

As 83 drew to a close the senatorial leadership knew the noose was drawing around their necks, so along with one of Cinna's old co-consuls Papirius Carbo, they elected 26 year old Gaius Marius the Younger in an attempt to boost the morale of his father's old supporters. However, the younger Marius was not his father, and besides, it is doubtful even the old man in his prime could stop Sulla now.

Civil War

The campaign season of 82 opened with Metellus Pius arriving with his army in North Italy where he rendezvoused with Pompey. The newly elected consul, Papirius Carbo, led an army north to face them, while Marius the Younger built an army to face Sulla who, it was clear, would soon be marching on Rome. Marius found willing recruits among the Samnites, who feared a return to power of the reactionary conservative wing of the Roman aristocracy. They had only recently been granted full rights in the aftermath of the Social War and had no intention of seeing their natural allies in Rome, the Marian populares, ousted from power. Would the conservative Sulla rescind the suffrage they had so recently won in his inevitable post-victory restructuring? They had no desire to find out. With the force of Samnites on board Marius would now at least be able to make a go of it against Sulla — who so far looked indestructible.

However, Carbo and Marius were simply not up to the task of warding off Sulla's onslaught. This is not to say they were not capable, just that they were facing some of the most accomplished generals in Roman history. In the north, Carbo was defeated by the combined army of Pompey and Metellus and withdrew to Etruria where he hoped to prevent them from marching on Rome. In the south Sulla and Marius the Younger met and fought a prolonged battle but as was the case throughout this civil war, defections cost Marius too many men and he was forced to withdraw behind the walls of a local allied city. Leaving a siege force in place, Sulla marched north to Etruria where he planned to crush Carbo and then sweep into Rome. Although Sulla was unable to dislodge Carbo from his position, it was clear to the beleaguered consul that he would not be able to hold out forever and essentially Italy was already in the hands of Sulla. Rather than make a last stand Carbo slipped out the back and fled, spending the next year hiding out in the small islands off the Sicilian coast.

In November of 82 BC, an army of Samnites emerged to relieve Marius and his trapped army but they were unable to break the siege. So the Samnite general tried a different tack and ordered his army to march straight for Rome. Dismayed that this enemy army was in a position to actually capture Rome, Sulla swept in from Etruria to halt their advance. The two armies faced each other just beyond the Colline Gate, in Rome's northwest quadrant. The ensuing battle was a massive and desperate struggle between two forces who felt their very existence at stake. No victor emerging from a civil war can afford to keep his rivals alive for long. Post-war purges are usually swift and brutal. In the Battle of the Colline Gate, Crassus famously secured

victory for Sulla by routing the left wing of the Samnite line. Sulla's army was able to engulf the opposing army and destroy them. In all, it is estimated the 50,000 died in the fighting. Marius the Younger, upon hearing the news, committed suicide while still besieged. The next morning, the fields just beyond the northwest gate were strewn with bodies and blood — and Sulla remained standing, now the undisputed master of Rome.

The Sullan Proscriptions

The victorious general and the cowed senate that welcomed him into the city were not content simply to let his newly won power be a tacit understanding between the people and their new master. The nudge-wink dictatorships of Marius and Cinna would not do for Sulla, and the senate proclaimed him dictator. However, this would be no standard-issue six-month constitutional dictatorship — no. Sulla's dictatorship, in an unprecedented development, would have no term limit. Sulla had become Rome's first Dictator for Life and the doomsday clock of the republic moved another minute closer to midnight.

Though there were some high-minded reforms that Sulla had every intention of carrying out with his new-found unlimited power, he began his reign in true Machiavellian fashion. Machiavelli advises that a Prince who has entered office through revolution, conquest or coup ought first to eliminate all rival claimants to the throne. If one succumbs to compassion too soon, these rival claimants will become centers around which opposition can rally, forcing the Prince to initiate ever escalating cycles of civil repressions that will make him unpopular with the people and lead to his downfall. Better to get all the bloodshed and terror out of the way early — that way there will be no opposition to worry about. The people will soon forget the initial horror and regard the later mild temperament of the Prince as a reflection of his true character and he will remain popular, and most importantly, in power. Machiavelli pointed to the example of Sulla as the living embodiment of this theory.

Dictator for Life Sulla posted in the forum a list of Marian partisans — 1500 men of the aristocracy — whom he considered to be enemies and therefore now enemies of the state. He announced rewards for killing or capturing the proscribed, among whom were 40 senators. In the reign of terror that followed the murderous frenzy ultimately engulfed some 9000 men, women and children, most of whom had nothing to do with the rivalry between Marius and Sulla. Have you had your eye on your neighbor's house for a while? Want to get out of debt? Want to bury a business rival? Well, here's your chance. Just accuse your chosen victim of Marian sympathies and, *voila*, your personal beef becomes state policy. The killing went on for months and all Rome lived in fear of waking up and finding their names on the proscribed list. In a fun twist, there was also nowhere for the condemned to turn as harboring the proscribed was itself a capital crime.

One young man in particular found himself on the proscribed list

by virtue of having married Cinna's daughter. Young Julius Caesar hid out for months, hopping from house to house, sheltered by pro-Sulla relatives who begged the new dictator to allow the young man to live. Sulla eventually relented at their entreaties, but with famous reluctance. Sulla could see that the ambitious young noble was dangerous. In Caesar, Sulla said, he saw many a Marius. One wonders how history would have been altered had Sulla's heart been just a little harder and he had had the young man executed. Would we all be ordering delicious Pompey Salads for lunch?

Sulla's Reforms

With his stranglehold on power now secure, Sulla set out on the reforms he had been planning all along. A true conservative, Sulla had watched the transfer of power from the senate to the tribunate with disgust. Marius, the greatest of the new men had been the patron saint of the unwashed masses. Sulla aimed to restore the natural order and put the senate back in the driver's seat. Among the myriad statutory revisions he was able to enact, Sulla stripped the tribunate of all the power it had acquired since the first secession of the plebeians. He abolished their right to veto legislation, he abolished their right to introduce legislation without senate approval and then he doubled the ranks of the senate, packing it with supporters to ensure that no legislation was approved that did not have Sulla's personal favor. As a final blow to the once prestigious office, he declared that a man elected tribune was barred from running for any other public office for the rest of his life. Ambitious men were immediately diverted away from the tribunate as a stepping stone to power leaving the office deprived of both talent and power.

However, where would all those ambitious men go? Well, according to Sulla's new order they would enter into the recently codified *Cursus Honorum*. Prior to Sulla, the path to the consulship had had its traditional steps, but nothing was written in stone. Sulla decided it was time to literally write the steps in stone, in part to ensure that the eventual leaders of Rome had the requisite experience to handle the responsibilities of state but also in part because he wanted to draw out the process. A certain ambitious 24-year-old general named Pompey was already beginning to fancy himself as one of Rome's leading men, so Sulla moved the consulship, by law, at least fifteen years into Pompey's future.

The new path to power would start with at least 10 years of military experience beginning when a man was 20 years old and eligible to hold the office of military tribune, a quasi-political leadership position within the legions. At 30, a man could stand for election as a quaestor where he would serve either in Rome's central financial institutions or as high a ranking aid in a province. Quaestors were the keepers of the money, overseeing both military pay and the state treasuries and as such found themselves at the center of every important political battle, as all political battles were ultimately about money.

If he survived the cut-throat world of high finance, a man could stand for aedile at the age of 36. The aediles were in charge of Rome's

public infrastructure — the food and water, the public temples, the sewers and roads. Of critical importance for securing long-term public support, the aediles were also in charge of the public games. A man could make a good name for himself throwing lavish games, though in the process it was easy to go broke. The aedileship was not a required step, but it afforded the first opportunity for a man to become well known to the general public.

At 39 if he had not gone broke entertaining the masses, he could become a praetor, of whom six were elected each year. The praetors functioned primarily as judges, overseeing Rome's complicated judiciary but they could be assigned to lead armies or provinces and would, in the absence of a consul hold imperium, which made them the final word in law and order, life and death.

The final step was, of course the consulship. The minimum age to hold this highest office was 42. You'll notice that the higher you ascend up the ladder the fewer slots there are available at the next rung. If six patricians are all elected praetor at the age of 39, only two of those will be able to win the consulship at the age of 42. Thus, it became highly prestigious to attain the next office "in your year". Cicero would often point to having achieved every office of the *cursus honorum* "in his year" as one of his proudest accomplishments.

Now obviously not every man could pass through the entirety of the course and one might be tempted to spend some time as a quaestor and build a base of power by controlling the purse strings. To prevent this Sulla again brought to bear the oft enacted but oft ignored statute that a man must wait 10 years before holding the same office again. He also threw in the caveat that the year after holding a particular office the official in question must spend a year in the provinces as a pro-praetor or proconsul or what-have-you. The intent was obviously to physically remove the previous year's officeholder from the city of Rome to prevent him from further cultivating any relationships acquired while in office. Sulla hoped that his reforms would put a stop to ambitious men skipping ahead in line or building independent bases of support from which they could launch attacks on the senate and the republic in general. Sulla believed that he had made his own career an institutional impossibility and hoped to be the only Dictator for Life Rome ever saw.

Sulla Retires

As to the Dictator for Life, in 80 BC, believing he had set the ship of Rome on a safe course by re-empowering the senate, Sulla announced that he would be stepping down from his office at the end of the year and normal consular elections would resume. It was a decision that came as a shock to the entire empire and a decision that Julius Caesar would never be able to understand, often mocking Sulla in later years for not realizing what he had had and for his naiveté in believing that Rome had seen the last of absolute dictators.

Sulla was not quite ready for retirement though and stood for election as consul the next year and was of course elected. However, after his year in legitimate office was completed, he really did retire to his country villa where he worked on his autobiography and tended his garden, leaving public life behind for good. Sulla was a complicated man and his peaceful stepping away from power speaks as much about his character as his violent seizure of power a few years previously. The bloodthirsty tyrant who had overseen the mass murder of over 9000 was also the humble old man who had given up his power to retire in peace. Clearly, there is no putting a box around Sulla: he remains a singular figure in world history. He died in 78 BC and his gravestone was marked by an epitaph he wrote himself, summing up his life as well as anything possibly could: “No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy.”^[4] Seems to say it all.

Sulla saw himself as a champion of the old order and believed he had left Rome with the institutional tools it needed to prolong the republic indefinitely. The senate was back in charge, the populist demagogues were silenced and ambitious men were no longer able to circumvent the traditional path to power nor remain in power past their single year in office. However, all the revised statutes in the world could not distract from the example of his life and career. The last vestiges of the old republican virtue had been stripped away by his dictatorship and all that remained was naked power — to be acquired by any means necessary. Most of Sulla’s constitutional reforms would be repealed within a decade of his death and within three decades Rome would be engulfed in a war between the men who looked at Sulla’s career and asked themselves, as Pompey did, “If Sulla could, why not me?”

Chapter 35

Crassus and Pompey

In 78 BC, Lucius Cornelius Sulla died, believing that he had put the republic back on track. Since the end of the Third Punic War 80 years previously, Roman politics had skewed more and more toward populist demagogues, blatant corruption and a flouting of traditional virtue. Sulla, in his role as dictator, had gutted the power of the tribunes and put the senate firmly back in control of state affairs. He was not blind to the irony of his role as the savior of republicanism when he himself had so completely eschewed republican principles and the rule of law but desperate times called for desperate measures. Besides, he could always fall back on one of the first defenses a child learns to justify all of his extra-legal activities: Marius started it.

However, no amount of constitutional reform could divert the gaze of ambitious men from the facts of Sulla's life and the power he had won through brute force alone. Whatever had bound the leaders of Rome to the traditional republican governing apparatus and its built-in limits on absolute power, had been shattered. The first blow had been introduced during the time of the Gracchi when mob violence had been used first to kill Tiberius, and was then harnessed by Gaius; Marius hammered the point home when he brazenly stood for consulship after consulship, while Sulla landed the killing stroke when he had himself appointed dictator for life. The era of noble adherence to the rule of law was dead. The era of the naked power grab was at hand. Whatever great works Sulla accomplished in life, saving the republic was certainly not among them. Indeed, the generation that would ruin the republic grew up in the shadow of Sulla's dictatorship and the ringleaders of its demise were some of the Sulla's leading supporters. Two of these supporters, Marcus Licinius Crassus and Gnaeus Pompeius would eventually forge an uneasy alliance with an up and coming populist general named Julius Caesar to form the first triumvirate, the vehicle through which the republic met its demise.

Marcus Licinius Crassus

Marcus Licinius Crassus was born in 115 BC, making him 33 years old during Battle of the Colline Gate and the eldest of the three future triumvirs. Crassus was the youngest of three boys born into a well-bred plebeian family and was descended from Publius Licinius Crassus, who in addition to serving as pontifex maximus for nearly 20 years during the Second Punic War also held the distinction of being Scipio Africanus's fellow consul in the year 205 BC as the great general made his preparations to win the war. His father had been consul in 97 BC, governor of Southern Spain from 97 to 93 BC and censor in 89 BC. The Crassus family was wealthy and well respected, but eventually ran afoul of the Marians during the upheavals of the mid-80s. Though they had supported Marius in the past, they attempted to hew a more neutral line in the struggle between the old general and his younger rival and were marked for purging. One of Crassus's brothers had already been killed in the Social War, but his father and remaining brother were caught up in the purges and were either murdered or committed suicide. Only Marcus escaped to carry on the family name by fleeing to Spain in 87 BC.

In Spain, Crassus was able to hook up with clients his father had established while governor and laid low while Cinna controlled Rome. It went without saying that when news reached him that Sulla had returned return from the east, Crassus immediately declared his support and left Spain, intent on helping Sulla drive the Marians out of Rome. He raised a small force and arrived in Italy around the same time Metellus Pius arrived with his army from Africa. Crassus fought alongside Metellus until they all merged into Sulla's army prior to the Battle of the Colline Gate in 82 BC. It was in that battle that Marcus Licinius Crassus became a man in his own right and was no longer seen as simply his father's son. With Sulla leading the left side of the line, he gave Crassus command of the right. As it turned out, Sulla found himself evenly matched and was unable to break through the Samnite line. However, Crassus routed his opposition and was able to wheel in and trap the remaining Samnites, winning for Sulla not just the battle, but complete control of Rome.

He expected to be well rewarded and praised for his early support and critical role in Sulla's victory, but in the first chapter of what turned out to be the defining story of his life Crassus was overshadowed by the younger and more charismatic Pompey. Though mildly embittered by his apparent snubbing, Crassus had far more important things to worry about than why young Pompey had been granted a triumph despite never having held a single office in the

cursus honorum. I mean, he had never even been a quaestor, let alone a praetor (which was supposedly the minimum rank required for a triumph) and besides that he was what? 25? He couldn't even stand for the office if he wanted to. But, like I say, I don't care. Why should I care? I'm fine with it. I'm happy for him. Hooray for Pompey. Pompey the Great.

Yeah, sure. Crassus didn't care at all.

The Richest Man in Rome

Instead of dwelling on Pompey (there would be plenty of time for that later) Crassus focused on rebuilding the family fortune, which had been expropriated by the Marians after his father's death. In this pursuit Crassus showed shrewd financial acumen as well as a penchant for ruthlessness below the belt profiteering. He gleefully entered the chaotic economic mess that arose from Sulla's reign of terror. Having been a victim of the Marian purges, Crassus had little sympathy for the men who had killed his father and brother. He was first in line to buy up whatever the proscribed left behind when they either fled or were murdered and on at least one occasion added a name to the list simply because he coveted the holdings of an otherwise politically neutral rival. During Sulla's reign, Crassus bought and sold his way to the top of Rome's financial food chain and after the dictator's death he invested his profits in the slave trade and silver mines where he doubled and then quadrupled his money.

Eventually he would become Rome's richest man and largest landowner. He never lost his lust for wealth nor his cunning skill for acquiring it. For example, at the time, Rome had no formal firefighting service. So when Crassus learned, through his city-wide network of clients and informants that a building was on fire, he would arrive on the scene with hundreds of slaves in tow. With the house burning in front of them, Crassus would offer to put the fire out if the distraught owner agreed to sell the property. In these circumstances Crassus was of course able to extract a ridiculously low price, at which point his slaves would indeed quell the blaze. Sometimes though the owner would refuse to sell, in which case Crassus would leave, letting the house be destroyed. However, these were rare instances, usually the owner sold, Crassus bought and his private empire grew by another block.

At the height of his power Crassus is estimated to have been worth between 170 and 180 billion 2008 dollars. To put that in perspective the richest man in the world today is Warren Buffet, who is estimated to have a personal financial net worth of around \$66 billion. To say that Crassus was absolutely filthy stinking rich is an understatement. However, he always carried with him something of an inferiority complex. In Roman culture, wealth may have been looked upon with envy, but rarely with respect or admiration. Respect and admiration was reserved for military heroes. His exploits during the Battle of the Colline Gate were always looked at sideways as they came during a civil war and were achieved at the expense of fellow Roman citizens. If Crassus wanted to join the pantheon of Great Romans he would

have to do better, to win new territory for Rome or defend the empire from a dangerous foreign threat. Crassus spent his entire life looking for an opportunity to lead an army in the field, win a great victory for Rome, a triumph for himself and the respect he felt he deserved. Eventually this obsession would lead to his death in Syria, having never achieved true glory.

On the battlefield Crassus was simply unable to match the exploits of his contemporary rival and nominal ally Pompey, who, much to Crassus's eternal bitterness seemed to live a perpetually charmed life. From Crassus's perspective, no one got better press for doing less than Pompey, but there was nothing he could do about it. So Crassus went through life known as Crassus Dives or Crassus the Rich, whereas Pompey went through life known as Pompeius Magnus, or Pompey the Great. Although the latter's nickname was originally thrown around as a sarcastic dig by his elders, Pompey eventually promoted it as a literal title and the people of Rome embraced it as such — much to Crassus's undying dismay.

Pompey the Great

Pompey was born in 106 BC, making him nine years younger than Crassus and only 24 years old when Sulla won control of Rome. He was the son of the not so beloved Gneaus Pompeius Strabo, or Pompey the Cross-eyed. Pompey Strabo was the first in his family to achieve senatorial status and distinguished himself during the Social War, leading the victorious Roman armies in the north as consul in 89 BC. However, when you emerge from a war with the nickname 'the Butcher' it might indicate that some of your tactics were a little too harsh. So when Pompey Strabo, AKA the Butcher of Asculum, died in 87 BC of the plague, his body was dragged through the street by a joyously disrespectful mob. Not exactly the funeral procession one hopes for.

However, the sins of the father did not seem to rub off on the son, and when Sulla returned from the east Pompey raised three legions from the ranks of his father's veterans. The young man had served with them since his first campaign at the age of 17 so his father's soldiers loved and trusted the boy who had grown up in the barracks as one of their own. After helping pacify northern Italy, Pompey was next given the task of ensuring the loyalty of Sicily, which was still teaming with Marians. Sicily was the breadbasket of Rome and controlling it was essential to controlling the empire. As long as Rome remained fed the people were generally content to allow themselves to be led by whoever wanted the job, but if the grain shipments ever stopped, anarchy, as they say was only three missed meals away. If the Marians controlled Sicily, they could wreak havoc on Sulla's attempt to consolidate power.

Pompey threw himself into the task with a ruthlessness that reminded some of his father. He tracked down Papirius Carbo, who had fled from Etruria at the end of the civil war and had him executed. When the people of Sicily complained that Pompey's methods were illegal, he dismissed them with a remark that revealed not only his personal philosophy, but the growing sentiment of ambitious military men everywhere: "Won't you stop citing laws to us who have our swords by our sides?" A generation later this is the man who *defended* the Republic against Caesar. Clearly, the rule of law was not long for this particular world.

Having pacified Sicily, Pompey sailed for Africa where he defeated the scattered remnants of Sulla's enemies. For this last act Pompey decided that he deserved a triumph. Where he got the idea that he deserved one is a mystery for the ages because not only was he not old

enough, he had not reached the minimum office required, praetor, to be considered for this greatest military honor. In fact, at this point Pompey had not served in any public office at all. And finally, it had been long standing tradition that a triumph could not be approved if the battle or battles in question were against fellow Romans, which is, of course, what Pompey's African campaign was all about. It is from this impetuosity that Sulla hung the sarcastic title Magnus on Pompey: Ah, yes, Pompey the Great wants a triumph. However, Pompey was undeterred. He refused to disband his army until his request was granted. Sulla, partly to appease his wife and stepdaughter who had married Pompey the year before, and partly out of genuine fear of what Pompey might be capable of, approved the triumph. However, Pompey would have to wait. First Sulla held his own triumph marching through the city to great fanfare and with much splendor. Next Metellus Pius was granted his triumph and the senior general marched through in similar splendor but with slightly less fanfare. By the time Pompey had his triumph the city showed little enthusiasm for the event. What? Another triumph? Sulla hoped he had put young Pompey in his place. However, Sulla died before he could discover that nothing and nobody would ever put Pompey in his place.

It was not long after Sulla's death that the first in a long line of would-be despots arose in his wake. A consul named Lepidus decided after his term was complete that he was not ready to give up the reins of power and gathered an army in northern Italy to support his bid for a second term. Lepidus himself arrived in Rome with a great train of supporters claiming that he controlled the land between the Po River and the Alps and that his second consulship had better be approved, or else. The senate had already sent Metellus Pius to Spain where the last great Marian general Quintus Sertorius continued to hold out, so they sent young Pompey north to quell the brewing insurrection. It did not take long to scatter Lepidus's supposed army and send word to the city that it had nothing to fear. Lepidus, who fancied himself the next Sulla was forced to flee from the city, never to return.

Pompey goes to Spain

After ending the threat from Lepidus, Pompey issued a demand to the senate that was even more insane than his request for a triumph. He wrote that he wanted to be sent to Spain as proconsul with full imperium. Again Pompey had never served in office a day in his life and was 15 years away from even being eligible for a consulship, let alone a proconsulship which was reserved for men who had already served as consul. Pompey knew it was brash, but also knew as well as the senate the situation on the ground in Spain. Metellus Pius, as great a general as he was, had been so far unable to gain ground on the rogue Quintus Sertorius. It was clear that Pius needed help and that Pompey was heads and shoulders better than anyone else Rome could possibly send as a reinforcement. With great reluctance, they approved Pompey's request and made him proconsul of Spain in 76 BC, at the tender age of 30. Crassus was of course appalled.

Pompey remained in Spain for the next five years, engaged in a parallel, rather than combined, war effort alongside Metellus. Neither general had any wish to share the glory should one of them actually succeed in defeating the rebellious Sertorius. However, neither had much to worry about as the Marian ran circles around them both. Pompey began to tire of the cat and mouse game in Spain and instead began to covet a command in the east where Mithridates was once again making trouble for Rome. However, extracting himself from Spain would not be so easy after the fuss he had made to get there in the first place. Besides, he had rivals back home that desired the eastern command for themselves and were doing everything in their power to make sure Pompey remained in Iberia, chasing his tail. However, fortune smiled on him and in 71 BC, Sertorius was assassinated by one of his lieutenants who then took command of the rogue army. This lieutenant was not half the commander Sertorius had been and in his first encounter with Pompey, was easily defeated. Just like that Pompey had liberated Spain. After lucking into this victory, Pompey took his army back to Italy just in time to luck into some more glory, scooping up for himself a good deal of undeserved credit for ending the slave revolt that had erupted in his absence — credit which he took at the expense of Crassus who had done the yeoman's work in defeating the slave army led by a certain Thracian gladiator.

Chapter 36

I am Spartacus!

73-71 BC

Prior to the Third Servile War, Crassus was just another fat cat and Pompey was just another ambitious young man on the make, but after the slave revolt both turned their well-deserved and not-so-well-deserved acclaim into a shared consulship. This was the benefit of being the savior of Rome and the fact that both had armies that they refused to stand down until the senate agreed to ... make sure the election produced the result that was in everyone's best interest.

In 73 BC, Pompey was in Spain trying to pin down the rebellious Marian general Quintus Sertorius, and Crassus was in Rome doing whatever it was Crassus did, probably dickering with a drowning man over the price of tossing him a lifeline. A young man, known as Spartacus, however, was at gladiator school in Capua. He was supposed to be learning how to put on a good show for his Roman masters, but mostly he was plotting his escape.

Early Biography

Kirk Douglas was born in New York in 1916 to illiterate Russian immigrants. His real name was Issur Danielovitch but he spent his early years answering to the name Izzy Demsky. He began acting in High School and knew from the moment he first stepped out on stage that he wanted to be an actor...Oh wait a second . . . I think may have mixed things up a bit. Hang on. OK got it.

No one is quite sure where Spartacus the Gladiator came from. It seems pretty clear that he was born somewhere in Greece and he is most often referred to as a Thracian, but Thracian was also the gladiatorial combat style he practiced, so there may have been some confusion somewhere along the line about his true origins. It is also unknown how he came to be in captivity, but he was widely believed to have served as an auxiliary soldier in the legions at some point and he may have been a captured deserter. However, as it happened, it did not take long for the traders to recognize that he would make a promising gladiator. Peter Ustinov purchased Spartacus and brought him to Capua to train for life in the arena.

The Break Out

In 73 BC, a plot was hatched at the school to break out of captivity. Eventually some 200 gladiators and slaves were included in the plot. However, with that many people involved, it was just a matter of time before someone talked. When the conspirators were confronted, after the inevitable squealer squealed, they decided to just go for it and with whatever crude weapons they could grab, mostly kitchen utensils, about 70 fought their way out of the school. Initially the escaped mob had no leader, but a few in the group possessed the kind of natural authority men turn to in crisis. One of these was of course Spartacus, but of equal standing at this point were two Gauls, Crixus and Oenomaus. Led by this trio the escapees showed more confidence and daring than one might expect from men on the run. The group proceeded to raid the countryside around Capua, which was some of the richest, most fertile land in Italy.

The majority of the Roman elite had country estates in the region — and where there are palatial country estates, there are slaves. None of whom were too excited about their status. So when the escaped gladiators showed up at the door demanding plunder, the master's slaves did not defend the master's things. The master's slaves joined up and helped carry off whatever they could. Soon, the band had grown into thousands. Displaying the kind of sound judgment and strategic thinking that would make them such a formidable force, the group headed toward Mt. Vesuvius where they were able to set up a stable camp on the densely wooded slopes.

At first, the senate looked upon the raiding as little more than common thievery and took no official notice. They did not realize that Spartacus and his compatriots were building an army. They did not realize that the Third Servile War had already begun.

Previous Slave Revolts

Now I'm sure you're asking yourself: *Third Servile War*? What about the first two? So let's back up a bit.

The First and Second Servile Wars were both contained to Sicily. I mentioned the former in passing during the chapter on Tiberius Gracchus when I was ticking off some of the reasons grain prices in Rome were skyrocketing at the time. That war lasted from 135 to 132 BC and was a result of the barbaric treatment shown to the island's slave population after Rome took full control of the island after the Third Punic War (149—146 BC).

The Second Servile War (104-100 BC) broke out a generation later when Marius attempted to raise levies against the Cimbri in 104 BC. Local provincial rulers across the empire complained that they were unable to supply their recruit quotas because all of their ablest recruits (or perhaps poor, young men) had been chained up and sold into slavery by overzealous Roman debt collectors. Marius ordered the release of any slave from an allied nation. This was good so far as it went, but in Sicily, many slaves took this to mean that they were free and were dismayed when they were ordered to return to their masters. A force of about 25,000 disappointed slaves formed a coherent army and broke into open revolt. Both slave uprisings were eventually quelled but only at the cost of great effort and expense.

Failure to Contain the Rebellion

So the Roman senate, despite having previously witnessed two slave revolts, did not recognize that what was happening in Campania was in fact a slave revolt. They dispatched an irregular militia of about 3000 led by Praetor Gaius Claudius Glaber to round up the fugitives and put a halt to the looting. Glaber located the slave hideout on the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius and settled into a camp at the base of the mountain. Everyone knew there was only one safe way to come down Vesuvius. The back end of the mountain was all cliffs. The slaves would eventually get hungry, come down to forage and when they did the militia would envelope them and Glaber would be welcomed home a hero. QED. Except the slave army had no time for conventional wisdom or standard military practice. During the night, they used vines from the trees and handmade ladders to climb down the sheer cliffs. While Glaber slept sweet dreams of a consulship, the slaves approached from behind, surprised the militia and killed them all.

Upon receiving the news, the Roman senate was nonplussed. The slaves were making a mess of everyone's favorite vacation spot. However, they weren't quite ready to commit the full force of the legions, so another militia of about 4000 was sent down but for some reason the commander decided to split his force in two before engaging the outlaw slaves. Both halves were too weak on their own and the slaves defeated the new militia with ease. So not only had the slaves now won three successive battles against the Romans but they also had the armor, weapons and equipment that had been sent down with the 7000 militiamen. Suddenly they were a true force to be reckoned with and slaves across the countryside, men, women and children flocked to the growing, formidable slave army. The 70 who had initially broken out of the gladiator school now found themselves backed up by 70,000 of their closest friends.

As the winter of 73 BC approached, Rome had a very big problem on its hands. The slaves spent the winter raiding the countryside with impunity and, most importantly training. Their survival now depending on their ability to stand against the Roman legions on the open battlefield. The core group of mostly Gallic gladiators would individually train groups of new recruits to block, parry, thrust, march and follow orders. Those newly trained individuals would then go off and train their own groups who would in turn train yet another group. Using this exponential system, by the time the campaign season of 72 came around the slaves were ready and Rome was preparing to send its consular armies into the field.

Spartacus Repels Consular Armies

By most accounts, Spartacus's main aim was to make his way north and get out of Italy. His fellow commander Crixus, however, seemed much more enamored with a life spent pillaging the Roman countryside. While Spartacus led the bulk of the newly minted army north, Crixus peeled off with 30,000 to continue to pillage the Roman countryside. However, regular legions are not drafted militias, and untested praetors are not seasoned consuls. Rome had decided that putting down the slave revolt was a priority for 72 BC and sent both consuls for the year, Lucius Gellius Publicola and Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus at the head of full consular armies to put down the revolt. Crixus and his force did not last very long. Gellius caught up with him at Mount Garganus near Apulia and the far more disciplined Romans were able to carve their way through the mostly Germanic infantry with ease. At least two-thirds of Crixus's army was killed in the battle including Crixus himself.

Spartacus, meanwhile, continued to march north toward the Alps. There are two divergent accounts of what happened next. According to the historian Appian, writing in about 160 AD, Lentulus placed his army between Spartacus and the Alps while Gellius, fresh off his victory over Crixus followed Spartacus north. The consuls hoped to trap the slaves between their two armies and crush them. However, Spartacus acted quickly and attacked Lentulus before Gellius was able to arrive and close the trap. The slave army defeated Lentulus's outnumbered legion whereupon Spartacus wheeled around when Gellius arrived and beat his army too. The two defeated consular armies then regrouped and combined, whereupon Spartacus defeated them again. I call this version *Spartacus Totally Rules* starring Spartacus, featuring a bunch of chumps. The Greek historian Plutarch on the other hand, writing around 100 AD says simply that Spartacus faced Lentulus and defeated him before meeting and beating another small Roman legion at the foot of the Alps. No mention is made of facing Gellius or the subsequent third battle. My suspicion is that the latter version which I call *Probably Closer to the Truth*, was probably closer to the truth.

Crassus takes Command

Whatever actually happened in 72 BC, the sources pretty much agree on what happened next: Crassus entered the picture and brought the Third Servile War to a brutal conclusion. The big gaping hole in the story, though, is why, having most likely defeated Lentulus and with nothing standing between him and freedom, did Spartacus decide to turn around and head back into Italy? This gets into the real lack of an answer for what the motivations behind the revolt were. Crixus's motives seem clear. He wanted to kill Romans and pillage. Spartacus obviously had some divergent motivation or he would have kept the army together — but if he did, why fight all the way to the Alps just to turn around? We will probably never know why Spartacus turned around, but in any event he marched back south.

With the failure of the consuls the previous year to get the job done (though Gellius pretty clearly did his part), Crassus saw his chance to win some of that glory that had escaped him by putting down the revolt himself. He convinced the senate to give him the title of praetor and command of 50,000 troops — more than enough to defeat the rabble once and for all. Crassus, by all accounts, was a strict disciplinarian, even going so far as to bring back the old tradition of decimation, by which every tenth soldier in a retreating legion is executed. He definitely came from the old school of thought that soldiers ought to fear their officers more than the enemy. It didn't endear him to anyone, and Crassus never enjoyed the kind of love and adulation that Caesar or Pompey basked in, but it got the job done.

Spartacus led the slave army south, all the way to the very toe of Italy, and began to negotiate for passage across the straits of Messina to Sicily. Sicily had given birth to the first two Servile Wars so it seems that Spartacus might have intended to lead a general revolt on the island to acquire new recruits and, let's say, overthrow the Roman Empire. His wider strategic plans are a mystery. However, being the leader of an outlaw army he was forced to deal with Sicilian pirates as his only option for ferrying the army off the mainland. However, having paid the pirates, the pirates did what pirates normally do: they took the money and ran. Spartacus found himself with less money and in a strategically bad position. The toe of Italy is not particularly wide, so as Spartacus was trying to flee Italy by sea, Crassus marched his army down to prevent him from backtracking by land. When the pirates betrayed him, Spartacus and his army found themselves trapped.

There is some indication that Spartacus attempted to bargain with

Crassus at this point, but Crassus would have none of it. He simply wasn't interested in bringing the revolt to an end, he was interested in defeating the slave army militarily. Crassus had more important things to worry about than the ultimate safety of the Roman people — he had his political career to look out for and was banking on a great military victory to catapult him into the upper echelon of the nobility. Why negotiate when the consulship was just a day's battle away?

Spartacus Defeated

Spartacus and his army were in desperate straits. Hemmed in by Crassus's legions, word also began to filter through the lines that Roman reinforcements were arriving from the east and that Pompey had crossed back into Italy and was heading south to aid Crassus. Spartacus decided they had to break through Crassus's line now or they would have no hope at all. He concentrated all his strength at one point and eventually his army was able to break through the line, running at full steam to escape the toe before the reinforcements arrived. However, the escape effort, combined with the nearly two years of continuous struggle and hardship had finally taken their toll on the unprofessional slave army. A force of 15,000 men were separated from the main troops led by Spartacus and were destroyed by Crassus and his pursuing legions. Discipline broke down around Spartacus as groups began to flee or fight depending on their own disposition. Realizing he would not be able to keep the army together for much longer Spartacus decided to make a last stand. The army turned and threw everything it had at Crassus, but it simply wasn't enough. The majority of the slave army along with Spartacus himself were killed in the final battle.

Crassus had put down the revolt and stood as the conquering hero of the Third Servile War and he wouldn't have to share his glory with anybody.

Except that about 5000 slaves had managed to evade capture and continued running north. Pompey was on his way south with instructions to aid Crassus against the great and terrible slave menace. Not making it in time for the main battle he ran instead right into these 5000 fleeing slaves. Exhausted, ill equipped and on their last legs, Pompey cleaned up the last remnants of Spartacus's already defeated army and sent a message to the senate announcing that he, Pompey the Great had officially brought the uprising to an end. When the honors were handed out, after the legions had returned to Rome, Pompey stood side by side with Crassus accepting credit he obviously did not deserve. The victory over the slave army was supposed to establish Crassus as the pre-eminent leader of the republic, but instead he now shared that distinction with Pompey, much to the former's chagrin and the latter's delight.

However, the enmity Crassus now bore Pompey was not strong enough to make him miss an obvious political opportunity. Both men stood at the head of large armies camped outside the city and neither was particularly disposed to disband them until an understanding was

reached. Each knew that the other was his greatest rival for power, but also that there were dozens of other nobles who fancied themselves the next Sulla. First, eliminate the pretenders to the throne then deal with the real claimants. So Crassus, Pompey and the senate agreed that it was in everyone's best interest for Crassus and Pompey to serve as co-consuls the following year. From there it would be easy to eliminate the weaker competition before inevitably turning on each other to decide the final fate of Rome. Who knew that Julius Caesar would beat them both?

The End of the Slave Revolts

The slave revolt led by Spartacus was the last such revolt in Roman history. Crassus would probably tell you that it was the fact that he ordered 6000 recaptured slaves to be crucified along the Appian Way as the reason why. He never gave instructions for them to be removed. The decomposing corpses, then skeletons served as a stark reminder to slaves everywhere of what happens if they forgot their place in the world. More likely, however, it was the shifting undercurrents of the Roman economy and Roman politics that forestalled more slave revolts. The bulk of the Roman wars of territorial expansion, where slaves came from, was now in the past — so not only would there be fewer slaves in the future, but those slaves would become a more precious commodity. The rampant mistreatment that had characterized the master-slave relationship previously shifted into something more humane. Eventually, in the empire, it would actually become a crime to kill a slave. The declining slave population changed the dynamic — so while slavery was still terrible, it was not so bad that huge armies would spontaneously spring up to threaten the peace. For the next few hundred years the greatest threats to peace were not revolting slaves or invading foreign armies but rather the rampant scheming of ambitious nobles to put themselves in charge of the greatest empire the Western World had ever known. It was a race to see who would be the first to usurp the authority of the 500-year old republic.

Chapter 37

Go East Young Man

74 — 62 BC

Pompeius Magnus hadn't done a huge amount to earn the "Magnus" honorific he had been saddled with as a joke by Sulla. True, detractors could still find reasons to be unimpressed with Pompey's exploits in the eastern Mediterranean but he took over a bogged down campaign in Turkey and by the time he was done marching, had set up a string of pro-Roman protectorates across the East that expanded the frontier of the Empire and, more impressively, nearly doubled the tax receipts coming into the treasury. Upon his return to Rome, Pompey the Great had truly become Pompey the Great.

Bithynia

In 74 BC, while Pompey was still in Spain and Spartacus was a year away from his breakout, King Nicomedes of Bithynia died and willed his kingdom to Rome. Bithynia was in the northwest of modern day Turkey and Rome had helped Nicomedes retain control of his kingdom in the face of Mithridates's ambition to control all of Anatolia. In gratitude he promised that Bithynia would become a province of Rome upon his death. However, Mithridates, who had been stalled but not defeated by Sulla years earlier, decided now was the perfect opportunity to step into the power vacuum and capture Bithynia for himself before Rome could consolidate its administration. The small kingdom had strategic value that far outweighed its territorial size as it straddled the Bosphorus, the narrow straight that connected the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, which in turn connected to the Aegean through the Hellespont. Bithynia, in later years would be the home of Constantine's new capital on the western side of the Bosphorus and thereafter find itself at the very heart of European and Near Eastern History. Its strategic location made it hot property in the ancient world. Rome wanted it, Mithridates wanted it, and both were prepared to fight for it.

Rome sent Marcus Aurelius Cotta to Bithynia to establish a working provincial administration in the former kingdom. At the same time Lucius Licinius Lucullus, a consul the previous year, was sent to Cilicia, a territory in southern Turkey as a pre-emptive maneuver against Mithridates. Lucullus had been a close ally of Sulla, close enough that the old dictator had dedicated his memoirs to him. At the time, he was considered one of Rome's greatest generals, along with Pompey, Metellus, and Quintus Sertorius but he had ended up on the losing side of the civil war.

Lucullus's appointment to the east was definitely a blow to Pompey's ambition, as the east was where the empire was headed and where riches and glory could be won. Meanwhile, Pompey was in Spain fighting the last round of a civil war that the rest of the empire had already forgotten about. Pompey tried to get himself reassigned but to no avail. The coming war with Mithridates would be Lucullus's to win or lose. Pompey stewed as Lucullus set sail.

It did not take long for Mithridates to make his move. With the huge distraction of Spain keeping the bulk of the Roman army busy, the Pontic king felt he could win control of Anatolia before Rome realized what was happening. He moved on Bithynia in 73 BC and besieged Cotta's legions. However, this was exactly the scenario

Lucullus had been sent as pro-consul to Cilicia to deal with, and the general marched north on receiving the news of the invasion. He drove off Mithridates without too much struggle and what would become known as the Third Mithridatic War had begun.

The Third Mithridatic War

Now I know what you're saying: *Third* Mithridatic War? What about the first two? So let's back up a bit.

The First Mithridatic War was Sulla's War (covered in detail in [Chapter 33](#)). The Second Mithridatic War was a brief campaign during Sulla's dictatorship that saw Mithridates make some gains, but Sulla shut down the Roman effort before it really got going because he had to make sure resources were going where they were really needed—and they were really needed in Rome shoring up his dictatorship. So historians call the events that are about to unfold the Third Mithridatic War, though the second hardly counts at all. And I'll stick with convention and not try to reinvent the wheel with my own rationalized naming system.

Lucullus was not content to simply sit back and defend what Rome had already acquired and immediately took the opportunity of Mithridates's invasion to invade the Pontus itself. Mithridates fled from his home country east to Armenia where his son-in-law Tigranes sat on the throne. The two formalized a military alliance to expand on the familial alliance that had been sealed when Tigranes married Mithridates's daughter. Lucullus did not immediately pursue Mithridates and instead spent the next few years consolidating Roman control in Anatolia — control which now covered the entire peninsula. Content that his rear was well guarded, Lucullus next sent an ambassador to Armenia in 70 AD demanding that Tigranes surrender Mithridates to the Romans or risk war. Armenia was at the height of its power and Tigranes was reasonably sure he could fend off any Roman invasion. He could draw from a huge population to fill his army and, unlike the Romans was not far from home or at the mercy of a logistically daunting supply train. He refused to give up his father in law. Surely, the Romans could see that they had chosen a weak bargaining position. Much to his surprise, in the summer of 69 BC Lucullus invaded.

The two armies met outside the Armenia's new, still-under-construction capital. The historical accounting of the armies ranges anywhere from Lucullus leading a mere two legions of around 12,000 against Tigranes's massive army of 250,000 to a more reasonable 40,000 vs 100,000, but everyone agrees the Romans were vastly outnumbered and that when Lucullus won the battle it was called one of the greatest in Roman history. As was so often the case in the ancient world, one trained Roman legionary was worth about ten conscripted peasants.

So Lucullus is the man, right? He went down as one of the all-time greats, right? He had conquered Pontus. He had just won one of the most impressive victories in Roman history. He was winning battles as far from home as anyone had ever won. Surly he wouldn't be recalled by the senate in disgrace and replaced by Pompey? Right?

Lucullus Replaced by Pompey

Unfortunately, Lucullus's victory over Tigranes did not end the war. Tigranes fled north and re-established himself in Armenia's traditional capital. Lucullus, meanwhile, remained in the south. He had bumped into the frontier of Parthia and decided to feel out the heirs of the great Persian Empire — possibly cement an alliance before they decided to aid the Armenians against Rome. Tigranes was able to use this time to fortify his position and raise another army. From this point on things started to go poorly for Lucullus. In 68 BC, he moved north and was able to defeat the Armenians again. However, he had begun his campaign for the year too late and when he ordered his troops north into the unforgiving Central Asian mountains in pursuit, winter was well on its way. The army refused to budge and Lucullus was forced to withdraw south rather than force the issue so far from home. The next year Mithridates moved back into Pontus and swept through the residual Roman garrisons left there, taking back the majority of his old kingdom.

The near mutiny was the beginning of the end for Lucullus's command. In a vacuum, he probably could have reasserted control of the army and moved along no worse the wear. However, by this time Pompey had risen to nearly the top of the Roman political mountain and had allies throughout the empire who were ready to support the young man in reaching the summit. Instead of disciplining the soldiers for their grumbling and complaining, the officers helped increase it so that Lucullus would be recalled and Pompey put in charge. So 67 BC was marked by an unusual standoff — Mithridates was too aware of his own vulnerabilities to attack Lucullus, but Lucullus was unable to make his own men march out to fight. The Pompey faction in Rome was thus able to argue that Lucullus had lost control of his army and ought to be recalled. They didn't mention, of course, that they themselves were responsible for the mutiny. The senate had seen enough and in 66 BC Lucullus was ordered to come home. But don't feel too badly for him—he returned to Rome laden with treasures from the East and spent the rest of his days in semi-retirement living a life of excessive luxury. So renowned were his feasts that the word “lucullan” is still used as a synonym for lavish. Furthermore, his recall to Rome did not damage his reputation much and though he is an obscure figure today, he was famous enough to merit inclusion in Plutarch's *Lives of Noble Greeks and Romans* — the hall of fame of the classical world.

Pompey Clears Out the Pirates

Pompey was granted imperium over the Eastern Provinces in 66 BC and told to do whatever he thought was in Rome's best interests. Since his joint consulship with Crassus in 70 BC, Pompey had been busy. Indeed, Pompey had just completed one of his more impressive undertakings — and apart from his actions in the Third Mithridatic War may have been his single greatest accomplishment. In 67 BC, Pompey cleared the Mediterranean of pirates. All of them. In three months. Pompey the Great, indeed.

Now this probably wasn't as hard as it sounds — it was simply a matter of someone actually putting their shoulder into the project — but nonetheless, piracy was a problem that successive generations of Romans had been unable to solve and Pompey figured it out in three months. Taking his cue from Alexander, Pompey did not attempt to solve the riddle of the Gordian knot, he simply cleaved it in twain and asked what was next on the agenda.

The big problem was that the Romans were never great sailors and never had much interest in becoming great sailors. They became reasonably proficient during the Punic Wars out of necessity but once the Carthaginian navy was abolished, the Romans returned to the land where they were most comfortable and left the sea to the traders. However, now the traders were constantly under assault and Rome's economy was starting to suffer noticeably. So Pompey, looking for other avenues to future glory in case he was never given command in the east asked the senate to put him in charge of the anti-piracy taskforce. Despite vehement opposition by conservative senators who feared Pompey's growing power, he was granted an extraordinary command — full imperium over the entire Mediterranean Sea, including all the coastlines, up to 50 miles inland. This unprecedented transfer of authority was backed, it should be noted by a young, relatively unknown senator by the name of Julius Caesar, who broke with the majority in the senate to support Pompey's command.

However, the conservative senate need not have worried. Though Pompey clearly wanted to become known as the greatest general in Roman history, he seemed to have little interest in making himself a dictator — that was a dream for other men, namely the obscure young senator named Julius Caesar. Over the winter Pompey built ships, trained his troops and devised a strategy. In the spring he deployed his navy into 13 separate designated zones each commanded by a separate legate. Pompey himself sailed with 60 ships, criss-crossing the sea at the head of this mobile command. Everyone's mission was

simple. Find the pirates and destroy them. Within forty days the western Mediterranean was clear and the pirates had retreated back to their bases of operation in Cilicia, Lucullus's old province in southern Turkey. Pompey then fell on the bases and destroyed the pirate ships with overwhelming force. Having lost their ships, Pompey was able to induce most of the pirates to surrender, promising to resettle them somewhere where they could take up the noble farming arts, make an honest living for themselves and, of course, pay taxes. Those who didn't surrender were killed. Three months after setting sail, the pirate menace was eliminated. True, the pirates had been living basically unchallenged by the Romans and their power had been grossly overstated, but still a pretty nice piece of work.

Pompey remained in Cilicia and the surrounding provinces after he completed his mission, helping to settle the pirates that had surrendered and overseeing various administrative projects while waiting for his allies in the senate and in Lucullus's army to have his rival recalled. When Lucullus was removed Pompey was right there to take over. How convenient.

Pompey Goes East

At the head of eight legions, and without the backstabbing that Lucullus had to endure, Pompey marched into Pontus and confronted Mithridates. The king's army was no match for the legions and Pompey defeated him easily. Mithridates fled back to Armenia to take refuge with his son-in-law. However, this time Tigranes denied the asylum request. With the great Roman general nearby Tigranes knew that the balance of power had shifted. Now was not the time to oppose Rome, now was the time to make sure Rome understood that Armenia was a friend and wished Rome no harm. Mithridates kept on the run, his influence all but gone. Once he had been regarded as Rome's most implacable foe and hailed as a great hero from Greece to Syria. Now he was little more than a vagrant. The world had moved on and Rome had moved in. Mithridates committed suicide in 62 BC in isolated anonymity.

Pompey re-established Roman control of Pontus before moving on to Armenia where Tigranes welcomed him with open arms and a bended knee. The best hope for the rulers of independent kingdoms when Rome came knocking was to be left in power as a client state. Tigranes hoped that if he could ingratiate himself with Pompey, Armenia would not be turned into a full province. His efforts were successful and Armenia was left as a buffer zone between Rome and the Parthians. Leaving Armenia behind Pompey continued to march east, chasing Mithridates and establishing contact with the locals in the trans-Caucuses. Eventually he found himself at the banks of the Caspian Sea. However, the land was rough and the locals not particularly rich and so Pompey turned south, hugging the east coast of the Mediterranean, which was the true center of the Roman world.

He led his army into Syria where the descendants of Antiochus were fighting over the throne of what remained of the Seleucid Empire. Pompey solved the issue by deposing the sitting king and establishing Syria as an official Roman province. He then continued south intent on establishing Roman hegemony over ten Hellenized cities in Galilee and Judaea known as the Decapolis. He then moved inland against the wealthy city of Jerusalem. At the time the city was in turmoil and in the throes of a civil and religious war between two brothers. Not only was Pompey worried that coastal stability would be threatened by inland instability, but he saw an opportunity to exploit that factionalism in the city. Both sides sought the Roman army's support and eventually Pompey did pick a side — clearing out the rival faction and putting his favored leader on the throne.

Pompey Comes Home

By 62 BC, after an absence of five years, Pompey decided that it was time to return home. By extending Roman hegemony all the way to Judea Pompey had fulfilled Rome's version of Manifest Destiny and the empire now reached across the whole of the Mediterranean, from Gibraltar to Jerusalem. He wound his way back home at the head of 45,000 men, and when he entered Rome celebrated the most splendid triumph of his career. This time there was no waiting in line and no sarcastic remarks.

The kingdoms conquered, annexed and allied during Pompey's campaign in the east literally doubled the amount of money coming into the Roman treasury — a staggering accomplishment when you think about it. Pompey himself was rich beyond his own dreams, at the head of 45,000 men and easily the most popular man in Rome. The conservative senate watched all this with understandable apprehension, but Pompey seemed content to simply bask in the glow of his own fame. In a few short years though those same senators who were forever trying to sabotage the young general's meteoric rise would be begging him to save the republic. He had completely circumvented the *cursus honorum*, had barely held an elected office and was hardly old enough to qualify for the rank and status he demanded — but he did not dream of being Sulla and taking over the empire.

In the next chapter we will cover a scheming bumbler named Catiline who would never be confused with a defender of the republic or a great general or frankly even a particularly adequate schemer. That a man like him could dream of becoming a dictator was a sign of the times. Rome was on the brink of disaster. The republic was on the brink of death and Catiline was just the beginning.

Chapter 38

The Catiline Conspiracy

63 BC

There were dozens of contributing factors to the breakdown of the old republican order in the first century BC. Some economic, some administrative, some martial — but what was really at issue was a sickness that had taken hold at the very root of the political system.

Until now, the quasi-religious sovereignty of the electoral process and the officials it produced was unquestioned. If you ran for consul and lost, that was it — you had lost. Maybe your political career was dead, or maybe you would run again someday, but you abided by the decision. When the senate handed down decrees or the tribunes passed laws, maybe you didn't like it and maybe you did everything in your power to get them repealed, but there was a way things were done. Maybe it entered your head to do something about those so-and-so's down in the forum, and maybe after too much to drink the conversation turned to topics like assassination and military coups (the latter no doubt a favorite topic among landless veterans for the whole of Roman history). However, in the morning everyone sobered up; the inertia of the system was simply too great to overcome. While there is ample evidence of political assassination threats directed at or by stalwarts of the old order — the Gracchi being the most famous example — there is scant record of extra-legal revolutions directed at the old order ever gaining much traction.

However, by the first century BC, whatever spell that had held ambitious men in check when they didn't get their way, was broken. The corruption that had taken hold at all rungs of society — the kickbacks enjoyed by provincial governors, the bribery that secured lucrative posts and favorable court rulings, cash-for-vote schemes that more and more frequently determined the outcome of elections — had finally reached the heart of the system. An entire generation of men had grown up in the shadow of Marius and Sulla. No amount of democratic whitewashing could hide the truth: power came from the sword. Those bold enough and strong enough could seize what they could not legitimately earn. It was understood that power had a way of retroactively legitimizing even the most illegitimate of actions. The only rule was power by any means necessary — because once in power the rules could be changed and those who disagreed could be eliminated. Oz the Great and Terrible had been seen through and the

man behind the curtain exposed. Cicero, the most persuasive speaker of his day and perhaps in all of Roman history, spent his entire career imploring his compatriots to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. However, words are no match for action. “Those of us with swords,” as Pompey so aptly described his brethren, were busy plotting how to kill the man behind the curtain and became the man behind the curtain — became Rome itself. Rome the Great and Terrible.

Lucius Sergius Catilina, known to history as Catiline attempted in 63 BC to kill the man behind the curtain. His half-baked scheme never got off the ground, but his story touches on nearly every major player in the subsequent years of civil war in Rome. While his plot was foiled, the sheer volume of willing accomplices shocked polite company and reminded those with similar ambition that one of these days the republic was going to snap in two and the important thing was not to save it, but to make sure you came out on top when the bough finally broke.

Catiline

Catiline was born in 108 BC to an ancient patrician family. While he came from a line of consuls — and thus would never be considered a New Man — the last of those consuls had served in the 380s BC. So Catiline carried with him all the arrogance of well pedigreed aristocrat while simultaneously bearing the insecurity of knowing his family had been trading on a name that no one in recent memory had done much to earn. This would be a dangerous combination. Catiline was intent on returning his family to glory. He was bright, energetic, and charismatic. A natural leader, brave in the field and savvy in the forum. There was no good reason why he should not be able to lead his family out of the political wilderness and his career began promisingly enough.

He entered public life during the Social Wars serving with distinction under the command of Pompey Strabo and alongside young Pompey the Great and the man who would become his arch-rival, Marcus Tullius Cicero. During the years of conflict between Marius and Sulla, Catiline did his best to keep his head down. He was neither important enough to be courted nor important enough to be disposed of. Semi-obscurity can be your best friend in times of civil strife. However, once Sulla returned from the east, Catiline was one of those officially neutral aristocrats who knew which way the winds were blowing and he publically backed the incoming dictator. He served in a variety of administrative posts overseas after Sulla's retirement and the young man seemed well positioned for an honorable career.

A Pattern of Disrepute

However, as is often the case, the true character of a man will eventually come out — and how he deals with adversity is often the best time to gauge what that true character is. In 73 BC, Catiline was accused of adultery, and not just run of the mill adultery, but adultery committed with a Vestal Virgin — a serious offence. However, at the trial, one of the leading men of the day and leader of the aristocratic party testified on behalf of Catiline. Character witnessing was a far more potent legal force in Rome than it is today and with the word of Quintus Catullus backing him, Catiline was acquitted. Now why one of the most important men in Rome would put his own name on the line for a minor noble is a curiosity. The Roman chattering classes assumed bribery played a role. So in his first real test, Catiline seems to have chosen to circumvent the rules and subvert the Rome's judicial system rather than directly face the consequences.

With that bullet successfully dodged Catiline went on to serve as praetor in 68 BC and then pro-praetor in Africa for the next two years. In 66 BC, he entered his name as a candidate for the consulship, but the censors denied his eligibility. A minor legal technicality barred his entrance into the race — namely that the citizens of Africa were accusing him of abuse of power, of using public resources for private gain and taking bribes. Furiously denying the charges, Catiline was enraged that his name was being dragged through the mud but there was nothing he could do — he would have to wait until the matter was cleared up before running for consul. In 65 BC, he stood trial for abuse of power and was once again acquitted when a number of leading men vouched for his character.

The skeleton of Catalina's career to this point is a matter of public record. However, a few of the more unsavory details are filled in by Cicero in his famous denunciations and later by Sallust who painted the entire affair as a morality tale with Catiline starring as the despicable enemy of the public good. Consequently, it is hard to know what took place and what was embellishment or complete fabrication. For example, there is a story of an initial conspiracy that has him planning the murder of half the senate. Even men at the time believed this episode resided only in Cicero's politically motivated imagination. Certainly, Catiline was not connected to any such plot by the time he was allowed to run for the consulship the following year — in 64 BC.

As much as Cicero seemed to genuinely hate Catiline — he really ought to have cut him some slack. If it had not been for Catiline, it is likely that Cicero never would have won election and earned the

consulship that he had been striving for his whole life. With Catiline running on a platform of debt cancellation and promising the sun, moon and sky to any poor sod who would listen, the nobility had no choice but to throw their support behind the provincial novus homo who had an unhealthy obsession with philosophy: namely Marcus Tullius Cicero. Cicero was a plebeian who was not even a true Roman but he was the most conservative of the available candidates and at least argued for the continued dominance of the senate in political affairs.

Cicero

Cicero was born in Arpinium, 60 miles south of Rome. The region had long been a part of Rome and its population had been granted full citizenship not long after the end of the Second Punic War but Cicero was never allowed to forget that he was a mere provincial. Furthermore, Cicero was not just a provincial but a plebeian provincial. He could trace to no consular ancestors and would have to rely on his own drive to battle his way up the political ladder. Luckily, he was one of the most gifted men of his generation. From the start, he was recognized as a brilliant student and his family made sure that he received the finest education they could afford. Like most of the nobility, he was fluent in both Greek and Latin and devoured Hellenistic philosophy. More than any other man Cicero was responsible for the full integration of Greek thought into Roman life — translating mountains of Greek literature into Latin and tirelessly promoting its study.

The Romans had never been particularly disposed to invention and creativity but they were masters of co-option and assimilation. In Rome no good idea went unadopted and in Greece Cicero saw good ideas everywhere. However, as much as he contributed to the cultural enrichment of Rome, Cicero saw himself primarily as a politician and pointed to his political career above his philosophical or legal pursuits as the achievement of which he was proudest.

After serving in the legions with resigned ill-humor during the Social War, Cicero started his legal career in the early 80s BC and quickly garnered a reputation as a great orator. However, after defending a man in a murder trial and pointing the finger at Sullan allies while Sulla still sat on the throne Cicero took a pragmatic, extended tour of Greece until the affair blew over. While in Greece, he was put into contact with the masters of Greek philosophy and rhetoric and Cicero perfected a unique rhetorical style that would make him the acknowledged master of his day. In 75 BC, he was elected quaestor for Sicily and endeared himself to the locals for his relatively honest dealings. They ultimately asked him to take on a politically dangerous case, prosecuting the Roman governor of Sicily on charges of corruption. Cicero finally agreed and spun the trial into his big break, successfully prosecuting the governor whose corruption exceeded the accepted standards of the day. From that point he was on the fast track — achieving every step of the *cursus honorum* in his year — finally winning the consulship in 64 BC for a term to be served the following year.

Catiline's Conspiracy

Catiline, though defeated by Cicero in that election, was undeterred and ran again the next year. However, amidst a trial for his role in the Sullan purges spearheaded by Cato the Younger and a lack of support from his wealthy benefactors (Crassus among them) who had supported him as an antidote to senatorial domination, Catiline's last campaign never got off the ground. His career effectively over, had he been born of another age, he might have sulked and raged, but he would have gone on with his life and found other outlets for his passions. However, in this age he was able to see his final defeat as merely a temporary set-back. Furthermore, he was able to find other men who were ready to help him expose the man behind the curtain.

Catiline began to actively conspire with other disaffected citizens. Their aim was simple: to overthrow the government. Catiline was motivated by personal delusions of grandeur and driven to extreme measures out of an enflamed sense of bitterness. The men he gathered around his plot, however, were almost uniformly brought on board out of base, material self-interest. From the upper classes, he found indebted nobles and corrupt ex-senators who had been purged from the roles by the censors. Men who wanted power but couldn't have it, and men who owed money but didn't want to repay it. Catiline promised them access to power and a cancellation of all debts once he was in charge. From the lower classes he stoked the bitterness of landless veterans and indebted commoners. Up and down the line, the message was the same: once we overthrow the government everyone will get everything they ever desired. Land, money, power. This was not an ideological revolution — this was naked, self-interest writ large.

In Etruria, a former centurion named Gaius Manlius began gathering an army. It is unclear how connected Manlius and Catiline were at this point but when Catiline was exiled after the plot was exposed he headed straight for the force Manlius had assembled. In Rome, the plan was to kick off the coup by assassinating Cicero. From there, strategically located conspirators would begin setting fires across the city and plunge Rome into chaos. At least that's what Cicero reported to the senate the day after he was notified of the assassination plot. Cicero's informants had apparently gotten word to the consul of the threat and Cicero posted extra guards, foiling the would-be assassins. There is a great deal of ambiguity about whether any of this is true but Cicero outlined the whole affair so eloquently and blamed Catiline so thoroughly that the senate came to believe the charges. Famously, as the senate listened to Cicero they moved one by

one away from Catiline who was eventually left sitting by himself, physically and politically isolated. Cicero's Catilinarian Orations are still held up today as some of the finest rhetoric ever uttered by man. How much Cicero was exaggerating is another story.

There is speculation that while Catiline was up to something, the assassination attempt may have been invented by Cicero to secure near dictatorial power in order to deal with the alleged crisis. It is further speculated that he wanted these powers not to deal with the specific machinations of Catiline and his conspirators, but rather to lay the groundwork for a defense of the republic against Pompey, who was presently on his way home from the east at the head of a large veteran army and with more money at his disposal than the Roman treasury had ever held. Cicero wanted to make sure that any internal strife in Rome was quashed before Pompey returned. Both Marius and Sulla had been able to exploit political divisions in the city in their quest for power. Cicero planned to deny Pompey a similar opportunity.

Catiline, now a pariah, agreed to go into exile, but lied about his destination and instead headed for Etruria and joined Manlius's growing army, for now the coup was still on, even without Catiline overseeing the operation in Rome. However, the remaining conspirators were not particularly adept at their jobs. They attempted to entice a group of Gallic emissaries to join their cause, but the visiting Gauls simply took the opportunity to earn the goodwill of the senate by exposing the plot. They talked five of the leading conspirators into affixing their name to a letter promising the Gauls they were fully committed to rebellion. The careless plotters forget the first and second rule of *Fight Club* and when the Gauls presented the document to the senate, the five men were arrested and the conspiracy inside Rome was short-circuited.

Consequences of the Conspiracy

Cicero and Cato led the charge in the senate to have the men executed at once. Julius Caesar opposed the death sentence arguing that exile was preferable. It would not set a good precedent to have men of senatorial rank executed without trial. However, with Cicero and Cato arguing that punishment must be swift and harsh the senate ordered the five strangled. For the rest of his career Cicero's enemies would bring up this bloodthirsty and illegal railroading of Roman citizens. Cicero's exile during the chaos of the subsequent years would be based largely on his actions toward the five conspirators on that day. Certainly it undercut every argument he would subsequently make about the need to respect the rule-of-law and the constitution of Rome.

With the inside men gone, the whole plot quickly imploded. Mass desertions from the insurgent army forced Manlius and Catiline to lead those left around the countryside, assiduously avoiding any legions they encountered. Eventually though they were cornered and forced to fight. The rebels, little more than a mob, were destroyed. Sallust makes a point of reporting that Catiline was killed while fighting on the front lines and unlike many of his men died of frontal wounds, not wounds to the back — the dishonorable sign that a man had turned to run.

The final verdict on Catiline is that he was a courageous, ambitious and corrupt man who concocted a plot far more ambitious than his abilities warranted. He was forced to ally himself with the dregs of both the Roman nobility and the lower classes and was easily bested by better men. He was outmaneuvered by Cicero at every step — never standing a chance against Rome's greatest politician. The Conspiracy of Catiline was an instant legend in Roman history — both for the central role played by Cicero and because it provided a blueprint for how not to organize a coup. Julius Caesar, of course, was right there the whole time, no doubt taking notes mental or otherwise. I like to imagine that somewhere in those notes, in big bold letters, is the line: Make sure Cicero is out of the way.

In the next chapter we look at Julius Caesar, the young senator on the rise, who will make his first attempt to get Cicero out of his way, not by attacking him but by asking him to join an informal alliance of mutual support that was being formed between Crassus, Pompey and Caesar. Cicero refused the invitation, correctly identifying the First Triumvirate (as it came to be known as) as a mortal enemy of the republic he so loved. Initially the threat came primarily from Pompey

and Crassus, with Caesar seen as little more than a pawn in their game. However, the First Triumvirate would spell the end for the republic not for the power it gave Pompey or Crassus, but for the money and support it gave Caesar, in whom, you may recall, Sulla saw many a Marius.

Chapter 39

The Young Julius Caesar Chronicles

100 – 59 BC

In the last chapter, we covered Catiline's ill-fated conspiracy during Cicero's consulship in 63 BC. The next crucial milestone in the fall of the Republic was the alliance between Pompey, Crassus and Julius Caesar in 60 BC — now called the First Triumvirate. In the aftermath of Spartacus's slave revolt Pompey and Crassus had served as co-consuls and though they functioned well enough publically, personally they were bitter rivals (or at least Crassus was bitter rivals with Pompey—I'm not really sure how much thought Pompey ever gave to Crassus) and after their shared consulship they were glad to be rid of each other. It was not until a decade later that they were brought together again — this time by a man who himself wanted to be consul and desperately needed allies for his coming flame war with the senate — Gaius Julius Caesar.

Early Life

Gaius Julius Caesar was born in 100 BC into the ancient patrician Julius family. Though the family traced their lineage back to Aeneas and thus to the goddess Venus herself, they had in recent generations fallen on hard times. While they always maintained respectability, they had long since passed to the margins of Roman political life. Caesar's particular branch was on the margins of Roman economic life as well and the boy grew up in a neighborhood called the Subura — which was far both geographically and culturally from the estates of his fellow patrician nobles of the Palatine Hill district. It seems probable that being raised in comparatively impoverished conditions had an impact on Caesar's later populist politics. Although he had impeccable patrician credentials, Caesar would always identify himself with the common man and position himself as their champion.

His childhood and early career were defined by two women — his mother Aurelia and his aunt Julia. With his father, also named Gaius Julius Caesar, forever away on state business and then dead by the time Caesar was 15, it was up to his mother to raise him. An intelligent and independent woman, highly regarded in Rome at the time and held up as the ideal Roman woman by later historians, she came from a family of consuls and made sure that her son had the education and grooming necessary to follow in the footsteps of his maternal forefathers.

The other great woman in Caesar's life was his aunt Julia, who was married to none other than Gaius Marius. The marriage had been a boon to both families, as Marius needed patrician endorsement to keep his political career moving and the Julii needed the money and fame that Marius brought with him. Though Caesar and Marius probably had limited contact with one another — the marriage joined Caesar at the hip to Marius — in some years it was for the better and in some years, for the worse. It is a testament to the esteem Julia was held in that when Sulla returned to Rome, the wife of his worst enemy and mother of the young man he had so recently defeated on the battlefield was herself left off the proscription lists.

Caesar's first step into public life was very nearly his last. At the age of 16, while Cinna ruled Rome and Sulla was off fighting Mithridates, Caesar was named *flamen dialis*, or Priest of Jupiter. One of the oldest priesthoods in Rome, it was also smothered by archaic and bizarre traditions that among other things, required the priest to wear a pointed hat at all times, forbade him from seeing a dead body, prohibited his riding a horse, wearing knots on his clothing or being

absent from the city for even a single night. It was also required that the priest be married to a patrician, so Caesar was arranged to be married to the daughter of Cinna, which, briefly made him son-in-law to the most powerful man in Rome. Not that this connection would do him any good personally, as the appointment to the flamen dialis precluded any political or military career, and the appointment was for life.

Luckily for the ambitious young Caesar, Sulla returned and annulled the appointment. The new dictator cleared the city of his enemies and had no use for Cinna's son-in-law and Marius's nephew in any public position. He demanded that Caesar divorce Cornelia, Cinna's daughter, but in an act of reckless or bold defiance depending on your point of view, Caesar refused. After this Sulla decided such loyalty should be rewarded and placed young Caesar on the proscription list. At the age of 19 Caesar ran for his life into the Italian countryside, hiding out with sympathetic relatives and keeping on the move. Back in the city his mother, representative Vestal Virgins and allies of Sulla with familial connections to young fugitive pleaded with Sulla to remove his name from the list. Finally, with his hold on power more secure, Sulla let himself be persuaded and Caesar was allowed to come out of hiding.

The Civic Crown

In 80 BC, the 20-year old Caesar knew that he was courting trouble by remaining in the city and got himself attached to the military staff of the governor of Asia. He would keep his head down and try to advance his career abroad — at least until Sulla was gone and the coast was truly clear. In Asia, Caesar served with distinction and was awarded the civic crown for his role in winning the siege of Mytilene. For the rest of his life, whenever he wore the simple oak wreath, all men, from the lowliest beggar to the greatest senator would be required to stand when he entered a public festival. Caesar loved wearing the crown, delighting in how much it annoyed his senatorial enemies to stand respectfully in acknowledgement that he was a brave soldier and honorable man. However, the siege of Mytilene would also prove the source of persistent glee for these same enemies.

In order to break the resistance of the city, which was located on Turkey's Aegean coast, the Romans needed naval reinforcement. Caesar was sent to Bithynia to request aid from King Nicomedes who died in 74 BC leaving his kingdom to Rome, which led to the Third Mithridatic War. However, Caesar seems to have done a little too well on his mission and lingered a little too long in Bithynia and rumors began to fly that he had carried on an affair with King Nicomedes. Caesar denied it all his life but it did not stop his enemies from referring to him as the Queen of Bithynia nor did it stop graffiti from later appearing on the walls of Rome that read "Caesar conquered Gaul, but Nicomedes conquered Caesar."

Legal Career

When Sulla died in 78 BC, it was finally safe for Caesar in Rome so he returned from Asia and began a legal career that would fill his time and enhance his reputation while he waited to begin the climb of the *cursus honorum*. Like Cicero, Caesar would make a name for himself as a distinguished orator while combating the excessive corruption of greedy proconsuls. However, unlike Cicero, his efforts were largely wasted on losing efforts as his words were no match for the bribes his defendants used to avoid prosecution. However, winning or losing mattered little to Caesar in the long run. It was only important that powerful men acknowledged his oratorical skill and that unimportant men knew he was on their side.

Captured by Pirates

In an effort to build on his natural rhetorical talent, Caesar arranged to be tutored in Rhodes by the same Greek master that had brought Cicero's skills to such great heights. However, he never reached the city because along the way his ship was attacked by Cilician pirates. Caesar was captured and held for ransom, a typical and lucrative practice among the pirates of the day. The pirates took a liking to their hostage almost immediately. Discovering that they were asking only 20 talents for him, Caesar was outraged and demanded that they ask for no less than 50. The pirates agreed to this humorous demand and Caesar sent away a few of his slaves to collect the money. For the next 40 days, Caesar lived with the pirates, never once showing any sign of the terror the pirates were used to seeing in their victims. He ate his meals with them, participated in athletic contests, demanded that they keep it down while he was trying to sleep and generally acted as if the whole affair was no big deal. He also joked that when he was free he was going to raise a fleet, come back and crucify the lot of them. They laughed, of course, but when the ransom was paid and Caesar was let go, he immediately raised a fleet and did just that. He returned to his place of capture, sacked the hideout and mercilessly crucified his former captors. Well, I shouldn't say "mercilessly," he did slit their throats before posting them on the cross.

Entering the Cursus Honorum

Caesar remained in Asia after his pirate adventure and raised a local militia to help defend Roman interests from the Mithridates's allies but he was recalled to Rome in 73 BC to join the spot in the priesthood vacated by his recently deceased cousin. Unlike the restrictive flamen dialis, this new priesthood carried with it no arcane restrictions and in the same year Caesar was elected military tribune, his first official step in the *cursus honorum*. It is likely, though not verified, that Caesar served in Crassus's legions during the Slave Revolt during this time. In 69 he took his next step and was elected quaestor with a term to be served in Spain. However, before departing the bold and unpredictable young man took an unprecedented step when his Aunt Julia passed away.

It was customary for the head of the household, Caesar in this case, to deliver a funeral oration in the forum. However, Caesar took things one step further. Since the reign of Sulla, Gaius Marius had been legally declared *persona non grata* in Rome and his likeness was banned from the public sphere. However, funeral processions of noble women usually included a depiction of their husbands. Caesar never hesitated and marched through the streets of Rome at the head of a column that bore with it images of Gaius Marius — images that had not been seen publically for more than a decade. Throughout the city, citizens and former soldiers remembered Marius, not for what he was in his final years but for the great man who had picked beggars up from the slums and made them honorable soldiers, who had ended the needlessly extended war with Jugurtha, and had defeated the invading Gauls. This procession marked the beginning of Marius's rehabilitation and earned Caesar much acclaim from the common people for whom Marius had done so much. The conservative senate, who would have been fine never hearing the name Marius again, were annoyed but there was little they could do to censor Caesar after the outpouring of good will from the masses.

However, the death of his aunt was not the only tragedy to befall Caesar before he left for Spain. Not long after Julia's death, Cornelia, the wife Caesar had defied Sulla to stand beside, suddenly died. There were traditions dictating who deserved funeral orations in the forum and young women almost never qualified for the honor. However, Caesar defied convention and delivered a moving eulogy for Cornelia. Whether it was his intention or just a lucky by-product, the common people of Rome were moved by his obviously grief-stricken love. This was not just another stoic noble — this was a man with a heart, a man of passion. They loved him for it.

Caesar in Spain

Eventually Caesar made it to Spain and while there began to set up a network of clients, subjects and allies that would serve him well for the rest of his career. Wherever he went Caesar brought with him a reputation for fair dealing, competent administration and mercy. He always governed with a stern, but understanding hand. When Spanish debtors were being hounded into insolvency by their Roman creditors, Caesar managed to broker a deal limiting the allowed wage garnishment percentage. However, in his apparent populism Caesar was wise enough not to alienate the lenders who were a) the men who could make or break his further political career and b) the very men who Caesar would be borrowing from to advance that political career. The wage garnishment limit was thus set at 66% — high enough that the lenders did not feel cheated but not so much that the borrowers were run out of their homes. It was the sort of practical, administrative decision that was the hallmark of Caesar's career. Much is made of his military acumen, but he was as deft with legislation as he was with the sword. His laws, as we will see, were brilliantly written, impossible to attack, realistic in scope and functional in implementation. Honestly, as dictators go, Julius Caesar was a man at least capable of doing the job right.

When his work in Spain was completed, Caesar made his way back to Rome along the Mediterranean coast through Gaul. On the European side of the Alps and then on the Italian side Caesar moved slowly, lending a sympathetic ear to the populace, settling disputes, and generally ingratiating himself with the community. As in Spain he earned a broad base of support that he could count on for the rest of his life, particularly, of course, during the Gallic campaigns a few years hence.

A Staggering Load of Debt

Back in Rome, Caesar remarried, this time choosing to the surprise of everyone, the granddaughter of Sulla. While the arrangement seemed to signal a shift toward more conservative policies, Caesar used the benefits of the familial ties he gained without letting it interfere with his populist politics. His career continued to advance as he was placed in charge of the Appian Way, a highly coveted administrative post and then was elected aedile. While serving in both functions Caesar borrowed enormous sums of money to fund public works projects, festivals, gladiatorial games and all manner of minor expenses. It was all in the name of career advancement, but the scope of the debt was staggering and Caesar's life would be defined for years by his running battles with and sometimes literally running away from his creditors.

It was during this period that his alliance with Crassus was really solidified. Everyone could see that Caesar was a man on the rise and Crassus was no fool. He was rich beyond measure, but lacked the kind of charisma that oozed from Caesar. By patronizing the young noble, Crassus was making sure that Caesar never became his enemy and that some of the magic would rub off on crusty old Scrooge McCrassus. Meanwhile, Caesar needed patronage. Numerous times Crassus stepped in when Caesar's creditors were working themselves into a murderous frenzy and pledged himself as security against default. This would generally quell the immediate uproar, leaving Caesar free to continue planting his seed money across the Roman Empire. He wasn't just investing in any old career. As he said once to a compatriot while passing through a tiny village in Gaul, he would rather be the first man there than second man in Rome. Power of the kind Caesar sought was expensive.

However, there was only so much Crassus could do to help. After his term as aedile, Caesar next needed a post that did not just push him further into the red — he needed to make at least some move toward the black. So in 63 BC, the same year as the Catiline conspiracy, he took the unprecedented step of running for *pontifex maximus*, the high priest of Rome. It was not only an important position politically, but came with it numerous opportunities to generate personal income. Normally the pontifex maximus was an elderly statesman near the end of his career. It was unheard of for a man so young to aspire to the office. However, Caesar needed to do something bold and quickly or he would be consumed by debt. Upon leaving for the forum on the day of his election Caesar told his mother, "When I return you will either find me a high priest or an exile." Melodrama aside, the outcome was in little doubt, Caesar had

bribed all the key electors to ensure that democracy did not interfere with the election. This lifetime appointment greatly enhanced Caesar's reputation as well as his financial portfolio. It also came with it an official residence, which moved his family from the out-of-the-way home in Subura right into the heart of the most prestigious neighborhood in Rome.

Courting Pompey

However, the office of pontifex maximus was part time at best, and did not preclude the office holder from pursuing military or political office. So later in that same year Caesar ran for and won a praetorship. He was now one step away from the highest office in Rome. Throughout this period in his role both as high priest and praetor Caesar openly supported Pompey's allies in the senate and popular assemblies. Pompey was wrapping up his eastern campaigns and sending home instructions that his conquests needed to be ratified and that his veterans would need land upon their return to Italy. Caesar had already distinguished himself as one of the few senators to support Pompey's grant of Mediterranean imperium to fight the pirates a few years earlier and spent his time now backing whatever Pompey indicated was needed. With his eye on the consulship and his dreams of reforming practically everything about the way the empire was administered, Caesar was keenly aware of the need for powerful friends. His populist stances and obvious ambition had won him no friends in the senate — if he was going to do half of what he planned he would need a way to blunt obstructionist senators. Caesar recognized Pompey as the perfect ally — a wildly popular general who made the senate as uneasy as Caesar did. By supporting Pompey now, Caesar hoped that when the general came home the favor would be returned.

Back in Spain

When his praetorship ended Caesar was named proconsular governor of Hispania Ulterior, or Further Spain — a province that hugged the southern coast of Spain from roughly modern day Valencia to the Atlantic. The governorship was a turning point in Caesar's career. It gave him his first crack at true military command, which as you can image he excelled at but it also set him up in a position to make money. Governorships of the provinces during this period were seen by most Roman politicians as their reward for the sacrifices and financial investments they had made on behalf of the state over the course of their careers. The personal milking of the provinces was not a scandal unless it reached egregious proportions. It was one of the things Caesar intended to change if he were ever given the chance — anyone could see that the annual appointment of some new governor who planned to make himself rich on the backs of the provincials was not a sustainable practice. Eventually they would milk the cow dry. However, while it was something Caesar intended to change, he had major debts to worry about. So upon arrival he promptly picked a fight with the hill tribes of the west coast that had never been fully pacified and drove them off — seizing the lucrative silver mines they controlled at the same time. This meant more revenue for the state — massive amounts of cash for Caesar himself and a territorial expansion of the empire — the thing triumphs are made of. Upon completion of this little war in Spain, Caesar demanded just that.

Triumph or Consulship?

The senate had no desire to grant Caesar his triumph but there was no denying what he had accomplished. However, Caesar further indicated that he intended to run for the consulship as well. The prospect of the popular Caesar returning in triumph from Spain and immediately taking the reins of power petrified the senate, but what could they do? Into this dilemma stepped Cato the Younger, leader of the conservative faction in the senate, defender of republican virtue and implacable foe of Caesar and who proposed a way to hold off Caesar's consulship. In order to qualify for candidacy a man had to be physically present in Rome. However, if a returning general entered the city before his triumph, the honor was nullified and the great victory parade cancelled. As Caesar waited at the gates of Rome, Cato did everything in his power to put the triumph off until after the deadline for candidature. Caesar asked for an exception but the request was denied. Cato went so far as to filibuster all business on the final day of the senatorial session to prevent the triumph from being scheduled prior to the deadline. Cato left that evening quite satisfied with himself, surely vain Caesar would not pass up an opportunity for a triumph, which may only come once in a lifetime, just to run for an office he was destined to win anyway. Imagine his shock when Caesar, abandoned his opportunity for a triumph and entered the city. He would stand for election that year, an election he would win handily to serve as consul of Rome in 59 BC.

Next we will delve into Caesar's eventful term in office, the reforms he tried to implement and the reforms the senate did everything to block. However, Caesar's support of Pompey did indeed pay off and his longstanding relationship with Crassus was formalized in a secret pact to push forward the aims of all three men. The secret pact did not remain secret for long though, for when Caesar stood before the popular assembly in order to bypass the senate's opposition, he was flanked by both Pompey and Crassus. It was instantly clear that the three most powerful men in Rome were working together — and as the masses cheered the senate cringed — how in the world could they stop this political juggernaut?

Chapter 40

In the Consulship of Julius and Caesar

59 BC

Julius Caesar's rise up the *cursus honorum* was capped by a successful election to the consulship for a term to be served in 59 BC. On his way up the political ladder Caesar had spent lavishly, bribed when necessary, made a lot of friends and even more enemies. More than anything else, he had established himself as a man to be reckoned with. He was an able governor and a brilliant military commander, a master orator and a shrewd politician. For most Romans, the consulship marked the end of a long career, for Julius Caesar it was only the beginning.

The consular election that saw Caesar emerge triumphant was a dirty affair, one that saw rampant bribery on all sides. It was obvious that Caesar was going to easily win, so the important thing for the conservative senate was to elect someone who would stand as a bulwark against any radical reforms they suspected Caesar would try to push through. To this end, they threw all their support behind Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus, who had served as aedile alongside Caesar years earlier and forever bore a grudge against his former colleague for taking credit for things Bibulus himself had accomplished while in that office. That personal enmity, coupled with a naturally conservative worldview, made him the perfect foil for Caesar's charismatic populism.

In anticipation of the struggle with the senate, Caesar had been lining up support across the Roman world, men at all levels of society who would back him through thick and thin, some because they genuinely believed in Caesar's programs, some simply out of crass self-interest. Caesar spread his bribes around liberally and promises of patronage constantly. It made no matter to him: a vote was a vote was a vote whether it came unsolicited or after a massive payoff. At the top of his pyramid of support Caesar targeted three powerful men.

The First Triumvirate

The first of these men was an obvious choice. Marcus Crassus had been a long-time backer of Caesar and their alliance was already well known. However, it bears repeating that Crassus was exceedingly wealthy and still dreamed of becoming a great military commander. Secondly, Caesar targeted Pompey the Great, who had struggled upon returning from the east to have his conquests ratified and his veterans settled. It took some deft maneuvering on Caesar's part to get Crassus and Pompey in the same room, but both were well aware that their own personal projects and aspirations could be realized with the help of the other. Last, Caesar made overtures to Rome's greatest lawyer and orator, Cicero. He appealed to Cicero's vision, intelligence and legal knowledge. The empire as presently constituted was unsustainable; Cicero could see that as well as anyone, but the conservative senate resisted all attempts at desperately needed reform. Caesar was offering Cicero the chance to have great influence over the course correction planned for the empire. However, Cicero rejected the mutual support pact, preferring to remain an independent, moderate voice. Thus the First Triumvirate was born, not its name at the time, nor a particularly accurate description of the wide network of supporters Caesar had aligned, but history gives us our shorthand labels and it is often easier to simply use them rather than try to reinvent the wheel.

The agreement between Caesar, Crassus and Pompey was made official when they swore a solemn oath, administered by Caesar in his role as pontifex maximus, to undertake no action that opposed any of the others. Pretty simple, right? Well, actually, yeah, it was pretty simple. And it worked, too.

Caesar's Wife must be above Suspicion

With his public support organized, Caesar wrapped up some unfinished business in his personal life — he needed to find a wife. Caesar had divorced his second wife, Pompeia, after a scandal that occurred at his house during the rites of Bona Dea, the Roman goddess of fertility and healing, that were performed in the home of the pontifex maximus. Men were excluded from the ceremony so Caesar was out of the house, leaving his wife and mother in charge of the proceedings. Into this segregated affair slipped Publius Clodius Pulcher, a freethinking, flamboyant, loose cannon who loved thumbing his nose at Roman tradition. Clodius, dressed as a woman lingered on the edges of the party until he was outed by Caesar's mother. For Caesar it would have been bad enough had the ceremony he sponsored simply been desecrated, but to make matters worse it was widely rumored that Clodius was engaged in an affair with Pompeia and was taking Caesar's absence as an opportunity for a rendezvous. In response to the destructive chatter, Caesar acted quickly. He divorced Pompeia, for whether she was guilty of the affair or not, "Caesar's wife must be above suspicion." The affair marked the last we will hear of Pompeia, but not the last we will hear of Clodius.

However, while Caesar's wife must be above suspicion, Caesar himself was under no such obligation. Caesar cheated early and often, carrying on affairs with some of Rome's most prominent women, including Servilia Caepionis who was at the same time the mother and mother-in-law of Caesar's two most famous assassins, Brutus and Cassius respectively. While the affair was on though, she was best known as the half-sister of Cato the Younger. Caesar played politics to win and knew he was getting Cato's goat, hopefully forcing the staunch conservative, in his personal rage and embarrassment, to get sloppy.

Caesar finally settled on marrying the daughter of the statesman Lucius Calpurnius Piso, who would coincidentally follow Caesar in the consulship, and with Calpurnia at his side, Caesar took the oath of office in 59 BC, immediately setting to work on his reform program. First up, as agreed to by the three triumvirs, was a land redistribution program aimed primarily at Pompey's veterans, but further intended to alleviate the general problem of urban poverty that had become a chronic problem in Rome.

Land reform

Since the closing days of the Punic Wars, land ownership in Italy had become more and more centralized into fewer and fewer hands. The large landowning nobles further exacerbated the problem by importing slaves to work their estates rather than relying on a sharecropping system that would have kept locals tied to the land. These displaced ex-farmers flooded into Rome, putting enormous strain on the treasury and contributing to a general atmosphere of lawlessness in the growing slums and housing projects. With so many of the landless being ex-soldiers the possibility of violent uprisings was always just a few missed meals away.

Caesar entered for the senate's consideration a carefully written bill to address the issue. State owned land would be opened up to settlement and state funds would be used to purchase further tracts from willing sellers at the land's assessed value. The money to do this would come from the treasure Pompey had brought back with him from the east, making the project cost neutral. In order to mollify the change-averse senate, Caesar specifically exempted the rich lands of Campania which had long been owned and operated by the nobles of Rome for their personal enrichment. However, the exemption was not enough and the senate, though unable to voice a single constructive criticism of the bill, nonetheless stalled its passage. If they let Caesar pass such a popular bill his influence would skyrocket off the charts.

Cato rose in opposition and began to talk — and talk and talk and talk. Soon, it was clear that he intended to talk until the sun fell out of the sky. The merits of the bill were no longer up for discussion, this was a naked stalling tactic. Caesar grew impatient and then enraged at Cato and in his fury made one of his few political miscalculations. He ordered that Cato be seized and hauled off to jail for obstructing senatorial business. The senate was understandably shocked at one of their most respected members being hauled off to jail like a common criminal and in protest walked out of the session *en masse*. Caesar caught a member who he knew to be at least sympathetic to his cause and asked why he was leaving, the senator replied: “I would rather be in jail with Cato than here with you.” This harsh statement, coming from a friend no less, brought Caesar to his senses and he ordered Cato released. However, the battle over the land bill was just heating up.

When the senate reconvened, Caesar announced that because the senate was obviously intent on blocking the bill no matter its merits, he would take his legislation, and all future legislation, directly to the

people's assemblies. At this point, the senate knew simply that Caesar was a popular and charismatic politician — what they did not know was that he had formed the triumvirate alliance, and that he had the power and resources to make good on his threat to bypass them completely.

The next day as Caesar stood before the popular assembly, an assembly packed with Pompey's veterans, the senate was in for a rude awakening. Standing beside Caesar were Crassus and Pompey. When Pompey strode forward and announced his intention to back the legislation with his sword if necessary, to the roaring approval of the crowd, the senate realized they had been outmaneuvered without even knowing about it. The secret pact was now out in the open, the question was, could the senate do anything about it?

Violent Confrontations

Bibulus, Caesar's co-consul, swore to do everything in his power to prevent the bill from passing despite the jeers and threats that rained down on his head by the increasingly unruly mob. Clearly, this was not a time for open confrontation, so Bibulus beat a hasty retreat to plan his next move. What he came up with was brilliant, obviously an abuse of power, but technically an insurmountable hurdle to Caesar's program. One of the functions of the consul is to decide which days over the course of the year would be considered holy days, on which no public business can be transacted. With the help of some conservative tribunes, Bibulus simply declared that every day left in his and Caesar's consulship was a holy day. Public business would be shuttered for the rest of the year. It was ridiculous and everyone saw it for what it was but there was little Caesar could do about it. Without a legal leg to stand on though, Caesar refused to be deterred. He pressed on for a vote on the land bill anyway and decided to deal with the legal implications later. The people, at least, were with him.

On the day of the vote, Caesar packed the forum with allies and victory was never in any doubt. However, Bibulus, much to the surprise of everyone strode right into the belly of the beast and began denouncing the bill and declaring the proceedings illegal. The mob erupted in anger, Bibulus and his lictors were assaulted — a bucket of manure was dumped on the consul's head, and most importantly, his *fascēs*, the symbol of a consul's authority, were broken. Bibulus fled from the scene. From that point on, he essentially retired from public life, spending the remainder of his consulship holed up in his house and refusing to come out. This was the origin of the satirical Roman quip that events of the year took place in the consulship of Julius and Caesar.

With the opposition out of the way, the bill passed and a land commission was created to oversee the redistribution. To ensure there would be no conflicts of interest, Caesar declared that he would not take an active role in the project. Crassus and Pompey, however, both agreed to the honor of serving the people as commissioners. After the law took effect however, it was clear that there was not enough land to fill all the requests. So, possibly for practical reasons and almost certainly for personal ones, Caesar announced that he was granting the new land commission purview over Campania, the senate's backyard: "Perhaps if the senate had joined with me in the initial stages of the legislation etc, etc..."

Settling Pompey's Veterans

Next on Caesar's list was the ratification of Pompey's eastern campaign. The incorporation of Syria as a province and the treaties Pompey signed with new client states needed approval by the senate to go into effect. Time had been of the essence as these territories directly bordered the Parthian Empire. If things were left in doubt for too long, it was likely the Parthians would take advantage of the uncertainty and reverse the gains Pompey had made on Rome's behalf. The senate, cowed by Caesar and knowing full well they should have taken care of this business years before, ratified all of Pompey's actions.

However, this victory left Caesar with a problem. Everything Pompey hoped to gain by joining the triumvirate had been gained. His men had land and his conquests were ratified. In anticipation of this inevitability, Caesar offered Pompey his daughter Julia in marriage. Pompey agreed to the arrangement and just like that, Caesar became Pompey's father-in-law. The man who was to have become Julia's husband was shocked when his prospective bride was pulled out from under him — but Pompey offered his daughter to the young man in exchange. All of this prompted Cato to spit that it was disgusting how Roman power was now based on the trading of women. By all accounts though, the marriage between Pompey and Julia was a happy arrangement, full of genuine love. And hard as it is to believe today, this genuine love actually raised eyebrows in the aristocracy of Rome and Pompey was subjected to endlessness jokes: “Get a load of Pompey, he actually loves his wife...”

The Lex Julia

Caesar's final piece of legislation proved to be perhaps his greatest legacy. The *Lex Iulia de Repetundis* — the Julian Law of Extortion. It was a voluminous and detailed set of rules governing the do's and don'ts of provincial administration. It set the ground rules and guidelines for the acceptance of gifts and set limits on the amount that a governor could personally benefit from his term in office. With one sweeping bill Caesar modernized imperial administration and brought the rule of law to a corrupt and inefficient system, if it could even be called a system. The Lex Julia was a huge success and remained in effect with few additions or subtractions long into the Byzantine age.

Letting Clodius off the Leash

Though it was obvious that Caesar was undertaking much needed reform, his term in office also showed that he was willing to ignore laws, tradition and common decency to get his way. The assault on Bibulus was particularly troubling to Cicero, who began to shift away from a moderate accommodation of Caesar to a more confrontational position. While arguing in defense of a former consul, and whom Caesar was prosecuting for corruption, Cicero took the opportunity to stray from the facts of the case into a broad indictment of Caesar and his tactics. Caesar was furious at what he perceived to be Cicero's betrayal. He had always done his best to cultivate a cordial relationship with the great lawyer and seemed to actually respect Cicero. Now the master orator was suddenly turning his considerable skill against Caesar. It was too much for him to let go.

In retaliation, Caesar decided to cut loose Clodius, he of the Bona Dea scandal. Clodius was a rabid opponent of all things conservative and bore a special hatred for the pompous and vain Cicero. However, because of the enemies he had made over the years, the patrician Clodius found himself publicly blacklisted from pursuing high office. So he hatched a plan to throw away his patrician status, an unthinkable act, so he could become tribune of the plebeians. The fix was simple, he just needed to be formally adopted by a plebeian, thus as lineage was patriarchal, he would immediately cease to be a patrician. However, he couldn't find anyone willing to make his proposed adoption legal. After Cicero's scathing indictment Caesar, as pontifex maximus and consul, decided to validate Clodius's adoption. The iconoclastic loose cannon was adopted by a plebeian half his age and immediately announced his candidacy for the tribunate. Once he had some power at his disposal he planned to unleash the full brunt of it on Cicero and against anything else he deemed decadent and worthless. Caesar hoped to maintain some influence over Clodius, but it would soon become clear that having attained the tribunate, Clodius considered himself beholden to no one.

Securing the Future

With his consulship winding down Caesar had two overarching concerns: firstly, he had to ensure that his reforms, now enacted, would not immediately be repealed and secondly, he had to make sure he was protected from personal prosecution. His enemies in the senate were compiling a long list of charges that they would bring against him the minute he became a private citizen. If Caesar did not secure a nice long proconsulship he was liable to be hauled into court and destroyed. Now it would have been unthinkable for Caesar to receive no proconsulship at all, so the senate laid the groundwork for his post-consular imperium to be granted to “the fields and pastures of Italy.” It would have been an embarrassing assignment that would have denied Caesar access to both personal enrichment and military command. The senators intended that Caesar command the streams of Italy for a year and then return to Rome a private citizen whereupon they would crucify him. Perhaps literally.

Toward the first major concern, securing the continuation of his new laws, Caesar took two steps. Firstly, he ensured that his new father-in-law would be elected consul the next year. Caesar could then rest assured knowing he would leave office with a staunch ally standing ready to veto any attempt to alter his laws. Secondly, he introduced a curse clause into the oath of the consulship. Upon taking office, incoming consuls would have to swear not to undo Caesar’s work because if they did they would be cursed. This was a very big deal to the superstitious Romans, and though I doubt it would work today, it would be nice to see something like this written into contemporary bills: “By the way you can’t mess with my highway works project because if you do the gods will flood your district.” That kind of thing. It may not work, but it sure would make the process more fun.

Toward the second major concern, protecting himself from prosecution, Caesar held true to form and simply ignored the senate and their plans for him to serve a meaningless proconsulship . With the help of sympathetic (bribed) tribunes and the tacit support of his fellow triumvirs, Caesar conspired to have the people’s assembly assign him a lucrative post that would keep him out of the clutches of his enemies and, most importantly for his wider ambition, offer him the chance for some good, old-fashioned military conquest. Today everyone knows Caesar primarily as the great general he proved to be, but to this point in his career Caesar was known primarily as a lawyer and politician who had had some military success in Spain. He craved the opportunity to leave civilian life behind and throw himself into a

great campaign on behalf of Rome. The question then was where best to geographically position himself in the empire to maximize the possibility of becoming engaged in military action.

Proconsul of Cisalpine Gaul

His choices were limited to the east, where he could possibly expand on Pompey's acquisitions, North Africa, where Egypt still stood ripe for the plucking and the Gallic provinces in the north. North Africa was out because Egypt secured its continued independence by way of massive bribes and the Egyptians made sure that Caesar's pockets were as lined as everyone else's. The Far East was out as any future expansion would come at the expense of the Parthians, and as great a commander as Caesar believed himself to be, he couldn't see much advantage in picking a fight with the heirs of the Persian Empire in the middle of the desert. That left the Gallic provinces. Specifically, Caesar had his eye on Cisalpine Gaul, or literally 'Gaul on this side of the Alps.'

The region north of the Po valley stood in a perfect strategic position. To the northwest stood European Gaul, or as the Romans sometimes called it — the land of the Longhaired Gaul. To the north lay the warlike Germanic tribes who were always stirring up trouble and to the northeast lay the unconquered lands on the far side of the Danube River. Furthermore, by securing the proconsulship of Cisalpine Gaul Caesar would control the legions closest to Rome itself, allowing him to keep an eye on his enemies in the senate. When everything shook out, the people's assembly granted Caesar the proconsulship of Cisalpine Gaul for a period of five years. The senate was furious but the assembly's decree went through before they could stop it. Almost as an afterthought, but of monumental importance to Roman and world history, the people's assembly also granted Caesar the province of Transalpine Gaul, or Gaul on the far side of the alps. Thus situated, all he needed was an excuse.

Almost as if on cue Caesar got his excuse. The delicate balance of power between the Gallic and Germanic tribes began to break down and a tribe of Gauls living around Lake Geneva decided they had had enough of marauding Germans. They would pack up their entire civilization and move down out of the mountains. They planned on moving into Roman territory, but surely the Roman governor, what's his name Kaiser, would be a reasonable man. Surely he won't build a giant wall blocking our migration . . .

Next, Caesar will build a giant wall blocking the migration of the Helvetii, the opening chapter of some of the most famous campaigns in history, collectively called the Gallic Wars.

Chapter 41

The Gallic Wars

58 – 52 BC

Caesar had succeeded in immunizing himself from prosecution by securing a proconsulship in Cisalpine Gaul for a five-year term. Over the course of his career he had ignored tradition, law, morality and good taste, and his enemies in the senate were salivating at the opportunity to see him in court. Caesar was guilty of the charges that would be brought against him as soon as he left public office, so for the sake of his career and possibly his life, it was imperative that he never return to Rome as a private citizen. As we will see, it was this legal axe hanging over his head, as much as anything else, that led him to cross the Rubicon in the fateful year of 49 BC.

However, this was all still a decade away. Now, in the year 58 BC Caesar took over the governorship of Gaul, setting the stage for one of the most famous military campaigns in history. While we shouldn't take anything away from the skill and daring of Caesar's campaigns, one reason the Gallic Wars are so famous is because Caesar wanted them to be famous. The thing that really shines through, more than his tactical ability or engineering accomplishments or strategic vision was his brilliant flair for propaganda. Caesar was the unparalleled master of self-promotion. That his *Commentaries on the War in Gaul* are still required reading for Latin language courses today speaks for itself.

Gaul

At the time Caesar took control of Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul, the land north of the Mediterranean basin was, from the Roman perspective, an uncivilized land populated by barbaric tribes. However, “civilized” is a relative term, and though to Roman eyes the Gauls were “uncivilized”, this does not mean that they were mindless brutes. There was no centralized

government and the basic political unit was still the tribe, but there were towns, craftsman, religion, money, ornamentation, literacy and political intrigue. The proper analogy here is the European arrival in the new world. The native Indians were dismissed as primitive by the “civilized” Europeans, but anyone who takes even a cursory glance at the workings of the Iroquois Confederacy would be hard pressed to argue there was not a sophisticated civilization at work prior to the arrival of European settlers. The same is true of the Gauls. To the average clean shaven, urban Roman, the longhaired Gaul must have seemed like something out of a primordial nightmare but there was probably a lot less separating them than either side would have cared to admit.

Independent Gaul encompassed what is today France, Belgium, the Netherlands and parts of Switzerland. The Romans controlled the southernmost territory along the Mediterranean coast, but since their days of initial expansion during the Punic Wars, they had shown little interest in moving north, and seemed content to simply control the land route to the rich province of Hispania. In the east, Gaul was understood to end at the Rhine River, across which lay Germania. The relationship between the Gauls and the Germans, and who’s doing what on what side of the Rhine will be of great importance not only for the unfolding Gallic Wars, but for the rest of Roman history, as the Rhine River would eventually stand as the official border of the Roman Empire.

The Helvetii Provide a Pretext

In 58 BC, the Helvetii, a Celtic tribe who lived around Lake Geneva, grew tired of dealing with encroaching German tribes. They decided to pack up their entire civilization and move out of the mountains, intent on re-settling in lowland Gaul. According to Caesar, the Helvetii numbered north of 350,000- with roughly 100,000 of those being able-bodied men. Their total number was probably more like 100,000 to 150,000, with 30,000-50,000 able-bodied men, not quite the swarm Caesar makes them out to be, but still large enough to be a menace to the tribes they would transplant when they arrived to build their new home. They moved down through a valley until they arrived at the border to Transalpine Gaul, which they hoped to pass through so as to avoid moving through free Gaul which was full of tribes who had no interest in the Helvetii migrating into their lands. At this point they sent envoys to meet with Caesar and request safe passage through Roman territory. Caesar agreed to consider the request and asked for the envoys to return later at a specified date to receive an answer. However, Caesar had no intention of letting the Helvetii pass and was simply stalling for time while he gathered his legions and built a huge fortified wall from one end of the narrow valley to the other.

When the Helvetian envoys returned the giant wall they ran into spoke for itself. Caesar's answer was "no". There is no doubt that from the very beginning of his governorship Caesar was looking for any opportunity to exploit perceived belligerence as an excuse to invade greater Gaul. The Helvetian migration was simply the first opportunity that presented itself and Caesar wasn't going to pass up an excuse to pick a fight. For the record there was a real concern that the Helvetii's migration would do serious damage to the balance of power in the region, and as governor of the neighboring province Caesar had an interest in keeping the region stable, but you get the feeling the Helvetii could have been looking for a place to plant a nice flower garden to brighten everyone's day and Caesar still would have poked them in the eye with a stick.

Caesar Gets Himself Invited into Gaul

The Helvetii were warriors through and through and reacted the way warriors react when someone aggravates them: they attacked. However, the Roman engineers had done their job with the fortifications and the legionaries did their job with the fighting and the Helvetii were easily repulsed. So the migrating Celts had no choice but to head north and pass through hostile Gallic territory. Caesar quickly returned to the Italian side of the alps, picked up three legions he had in reserve and raised two more from the local population. When the Helvetii spilled into Gaul, Caesar would be ready in case the call for aid arrived. Shortly, an allied tribe ransacked by the incoming Helvetii made the call. They found Caesar more than willing to help his poor beleaguered allies to drive off the aggressive Helvetii. Caesar asked if the allied tribes wanted his legions to march into their territory? Yes, the missions replied. Intervention formally requested Caesar had his legal cover. The Roman invasion of Gaul had begun.

Caesar caught up with the Helvetii as they crossed what is today the Saône River near the border between Switzerland and France. He waited while three-quarters of the Celts were across the river and then, with only 25% left on the east bank, Caesar charged in and attacked annihilating the far smaller group while their comrades watched from the far bank. The Helvetians were incensed at this cowardly move. Their sense of honor demanded open conflict between two armies with lots of opportunities for individual bravery. They did not understand an enemy that would intentionally launch a surprise attack against a much weaker force. They drew the conclusion that the Romans were afraid of facing the full Helvetian army. They should have drawn the conclusion that Caesar didn't care about Celtic honor.

With the bulk of the Helvetians now loose in greater Gaul, Caesar knew he would not be able to simply pick at the edges for long. He followed the Helvetii into modern France, but in doing so made a strategic decision that would come back to haunt him. In order to stay mobile during the invasion, Caesar decided to forgo establishing a secure supply line back to Roman territory. Instead, he intended to live off the land, and off the supplies he demanded his Gallic allies provide. This was a risky decision that very nearly ended the invasion before it began. Not all the Gallic tribes, not even all the tribes allied with Rome wanted to have a Roman army rampaging around their territory. Not only was it dangerous in the immediate sense that the legions would eat them out of house and home, but it was dangerous in the longer-term sense that Romans might get comfortable with the idea that free Gaul lived to serve them. So Caesar's request for

supplies got lost in the mail, or were mistranslated, or couldn't be met because um, we've had a bad harvest. We'll get you what we can Thursday. Oh wait, no, we meant *next* Thursday. It didn't take long for Caesar to realize he was being jerked around—and that he was now deep in enemy territory without anything to eat.

Battle of Bibracte — 58 BC

So he abandoned his pursuit of the Helvetii and made for Bibracte, a fortified allied town in modern Burgundy. The Helvetii got wind of the Roman plight and turned around. The hunted now becoming the hunter. The Romans barely won the race to Bibracte with the Helvetii cavalry harassing their rear as they approached the town. There turned out to be no time to actually enter the fort, as the Helvetii smelled blood in the water and pressed an immediate attack. Both sides secured their baggage trains and on 20 June launched themselves at each other. A full day's fighting with the outcome constantly in doubt finally gave way to night, the Romans slowly and methodically gaining the upper hand.

The Helvetii, and the Gauls, Celts and Germans generally, knew of no other way to fight than to charge *en masse* and engage in one-on-one fighting. How else could a warrior distinguish himself on the battlefield and earn the kind of glory so prized by his tribesman? The Romans on the other hand, fought in their maniples units, never breaking ranks and working with ruthless, mechanical efficiency. It was infuriating to the tribes and major source of the contempt they felt toward the Romans. However, at the end of a long day, when the Helvetii were exhausted, the legions kept pressing forward. Finally, they broke through and captured the Celtic baggage train. When you have uprooted your entire civilization and packed it all into a baggage train, the capture of the train means you have lost everything. The remnants of the Helvetii, the women and children and injured fighters, fled the field. Caesar's legions were so exhausted and had so many dead to bury that they were unable to take up pursuit for three days. However, Caesar sent riders out to all the local tribes threatening dire consequences for anyone who helped the Helvetii fugitives.

When they were recovered, the legions set off after the survivors, quickly catching up what was left of the great Celtic tribe. Those who had survived fell on their knees and begged clemency. Caesar spared their lives, ordering them to return to Lake Geneva where they were to remain — serving as a buffer between Roman territory and the ever encroaching German tribes. With no recourse, the Helvetii agreed. Caesar's first major test as a general was a complete success. However, he did not have long to bask in the glow of victory because, speaking of encroaching German tribes, one such tribe was pouring across the Rhine threatening to overrun the entire country.

Ariovistus Invades Gaul — 58 BC

While Caesar was beating back the Helvetii, political struggles between native Gallic tribes had led one side to call on their cousins across the Rhine to help them out. They knocked on the door of Ariovistus, a great German leader who was more than happy to have an excuse to bring his 100,000-odd troops into Gaul. The tribe that had called him assumed that Ariovistus would help them defeat their enemies and then leave. Ariovistus thought Gaul a nice place to rule and he turned ruthlessly on his nominal Gallic ally and nominal Gallic foe alike. So all the Gauls were forced to turn to the Romans for help.

This was a somewhat tricky situation for Caesar as Ariovistus had already made diplomatic contact with Rome and, with Caesar's support no less, been declared a friend of the Romans. However, that did not give the German king *carte blanche* and Caesar was already considering Gaul his own personal backyard. He marched north-east toward the Rhine where the Germans were camped. At this point Caesar was just coming off an extremely hard fought battle with the Helvetii and was in no mood to take on a huge and fresh German army, so his intention was to convince Ariovistus to withdraw back across the Rhine. Or at the very least prevent any more Germans from coming into Gaul.

Caesar sent envoys ahead to ask for a meeting but the German king would have none of it. So Caesar sent a note containing the provisions by which the Germans would be allowed to stay in Gaul: No more Germans could cross the river, any Gallic hostages the Germans held must be returned and they must agree not to make war on any native Gallic tribe. Ariovistus scoffed at these terms and replied incredulously that it was rich for a Roman general to be making demands so far from home. If Caesar wanted to force the issue he was more than welcome to try.

While this back and forth was taking place ever more Germans were invading across the Rhine and calls for help came from the local Gauls. Caesar knew he had to put a stop to the invasion — his legions could certainly stand to be outnumbered in battle but there was a practical limit to what they could match. So Caesar moved north through the dense forests west of the Rhine to close the spigot. Marching for days through trees so tightly packed the sun disappeared, toward an enemy that was amongst the most feared in the ancient world, the legion's nerves began to waver. With each passing day stories passed through the ranks about the Germans took on a life of their own, until the average foot soldier was convinced

Caesar was marching them to face 15-foot tall cannibals who breathed fire and used black magic to curse their enemies. Caesar nipped this brewing mutiny in the bud by convening a meeting of his centurions — the veteran soldiers who led the men on a daily basis in camp and in battle. He shamed them all publicly for doing nothing to stop the growing discord and all but called them cowards for being frightened of a dark forest and some no-account brutes from across the river. The shaming worked and the dissension in the ranks was quickly silenced. His army fully committed, Caesar closed the final miles between his legions and Ariovistus's massive army.

Upon arrival, Caesar built a fortified camp and was surprised to discover that suddenly the Germans were ready to talk. Ariovistus called for a meeting at a neutral site with numerous preconditions, not the least of which being that the two leaders could only be accompanied by cavalry — absolutely no infantry guards. In practice this meant that Caesar would have with him none of his fellow countrymen, as his cavalry was exclusively made up of Gallic auxiliaries. However, Caesar sidestepped this ploy by ordering members of his favorite legion, the tenth, to mount horses and accompany him. It was from this episode that the tenth, one of the most famous legions in Roman military history, earned the nickname that they would carry with them for the rest of their existence: The Tenth Mounted Legion.

The meeting with Ariovistus was as strange as it was unproductive. The German leader was agitated and belligerent but refused to commit himself to battle. Though he did imply that if it did come to battle, word had come from the Roman senate that the Germans had its blessing if they wiped Caesar and his legions off the face of the earth. However, while the two leaders talked the German cavalry hurled javelins and stones at the Roman guard. It was obvious that the Romans were being baited, but Caesar refused to bite. As he returned to camp the one thing he could not figure out was why the Germans did not just attack. They outnumbered the Romans, were in better fighting shape, had better access to supplies and a superior tactical position. It didn't make any sense.

Soon though spies in the German camp brought an explanation. The tribal priestesses, who determined through divination whether the gods favored battle or not, had been performing their rites day after day but kept coming back with a negative answer. Ariovistus wanted nothing more than to attack but he risked the wrath of his gods if he did so. Caesar immediately acted on this crucial piece of intelligence and made ready for an immediate assault on the German camp. Once

their blood was up the Germans were sure to fight hard, but maybe their religious hesitation would cause them to flinch or withdraw at the outset. For the outnumbered legions it was their best hope for total victory.

Battle of Vosges — 58 BC

The next day Caesar launched his full-scale attack. Whether religious concerns played a role in the fighting is unknown but the Germans certainly didn't act as if their gods didn't want them fighting. However, as with the Helvetii, a full day's hard battle, taking place first on open ground and then on the trampled bodies of the dead, finally began to break the Romans' way. One of the wings, led by Marcus Crassus's son Publius began to drive the Germans back, finally snapping the enemy line. The Germans broke headlong for the Rhine abandoning imperial dreams in Gaul and now hoping to simply make it home alive. The 15 miles back to the river was a running slaughter with Caesar ordering that no prisoners be taken. Ariovistus abandoned his wife and daughter to the Romans and escaped on a small raft back to Germania. He never crossed the Rhine again.

In one summer Caesar had destroyed two massive invading forces and was fast making a name for himself as one of the greatest generals in Roman history. Here he was campaigning where no Roman legion had gone before, defeating the very barbarians who had haunted Roman nightmares from the days of the great sack of Rome 350 years before. Caesar, of course, took every opportunity to send home breathless reports from the front lines about his extraordinary campaign, his own genius and the courage of his men and in the public imagination Julius Caesar was fast growing into a larger than life figure who would soon eclipse his jealous triumvirate colleagues, Pompey and Crassus.

For about a nanosecond the native Gauls held Caesar in the same esteem his fellow Romans did. He had prevented first the marauding Helvetii and then the fearsome Germans from ransacking their homeland. Think, if Caesar had failed, why, they could have been made mere vassals of some invading foreign power. They celebrated Caesar and then wished him a safe trip back to Roman territory. However, Caesar wasn't going back to Rome and his army wasn't going anywhere.

Caesar would use strategy to divide, conquer and slowly assert Roman dominance over all of Gaul. Along the way he would become the first Roman general to cross the Rhine River and campaign in Germania as well as the first Roman to lead an expedition to the mythical island of Britannia. Though the Gauls would eventually organize a resistance and very nearly expel the Romans from their country, Caesar would not be denied his prize and in a few short years, what had forever been a wild land of fearsome barbarians

would become just another province of the mighty Roman Empire.

Divide and Conquer

Caesar's first year in Gaul had been a great success for both the Romans and the local tribes. Two invading hordes, first the Helvetii and then the Germans, had been repulsed by the legions. Caesar was making a name for himself as a superb commander and the balance of power among the Gallic tribes had not been upset — so as the winter of 58 BC neared, everyone was happy. However, Caesar was not in Gaul simply to act as a bodyguard for independent tribes, he was in Gaul to conquer Gaul. To this end, he did not withdraw back to his province on the Italian side of the alps as the Gauls assumed he would — instead he ordered his troops to build winter camps and dig in. These wooden forts dotting the countryside were a visible symbol of Caesar's true intentions. Suddenly not everyone was so happy.

However, Caesar was a perceptive general and nothing if not a master politician. He knew that the jig was up, that there was no use pretending Rome was not in Gaul to stay, at least not when he met with the leaders of the Gallic tribes in private. Some tribes swore instantly to resist Roman domination but others were persuaded that conquest was inevitable and the only question was who would enjoy privileges in the new Roman order. Caesar played rivals against each other, promising to settle ancient scores for one side or the other in exchange for support, intelligence and troops. What Caesar managed to achieve in the end prevented the Gauls from ever truly uniting in the field.

Campaign against the Belgae — 57 BC

When the spring of 57 BC came around, the Roman occupation was immediately challenged in the north by a confederation of Belgic tribes. The Belgae lived in a region that covers roughly modern Belgium and was then about as far as you could get from Roman civilization. The tribes in southern Gaul were long accustomed to dealing with the Romans but Italian traders rarely made their way this far north. It is no great surprise that this would become an epicenter of resistance. However, Caesar had been able to convince at least one of the Belgic tribes that support for Rome was in their best interest. When this tribe came under attack for their foreign allegiance, Caesar was quick to intervene, hoping to prove that friendship with Rome was not just a one-way street: those who helped Rome would in turn be helped by Rome. It was also a lovely excuse to conquer Belgium.

That Caesar had a Belgic ally was the good news, that he only had one Belgic ally was the bad news. He marched the legions north to support his new ally and prevent the Belgae from coalescing into a single force. However, he arrived too late and saw to his dismay that a huge army was gathered. Skirmishes broke out and a brief bloody battle was fought to prevent a portion of the Belgae from circling around behind the Romans. Caesar, outnumbered and deep in enemy territory, had to think fast. Doubtful that he would be able to win a fight in the open, Caesar decided to use the tactic that had proved so effective at the end of the Third Samnite War. He ordered squads to fan out across the countryside and sack every settlement they came across. With all their warriors massed in one place, the civilian Belgae were helpless and soon the whole territory was in flames. With little internal cohesion except a hatred of the Romans to bind them, the Belgic army quickly evaporated as tribes returned home to protect their property.

Caesar was now free to march from tribe to tribe and pick them off one by one. Sometimes the locals resisted and were destroyed, but more often than not they surrendered. One tribe in particular though, the Nervii, neither surrendered nor were pushovers in the field. At one point they managed to catch the Romans by surprise as they built a camp and in the confusion nearly shattered the legions before Caesar could rally his troops and counterattack. However, aside from this one near disaster the conquest of the Belgae went off without a hitch and Caesar entered the winter of 57 BC with nearly the whole of Gaul already under his thumb.

The Triumvirate Meets

Over that winter, with the legions again building camps across the country, Caesar returned to Cisalpine Gaul to attend to his duties there, he was after all the governor there, and there was a backlog of important affairs that he had neglected. While on the Italian side of the Alps, Pompey and Crassus left Rome to join Caesar for a conference. The triumvirate was renewed and it was agreed that Pompey and Crassus would again serve together as co-consuls for the year 55 BC. The three men also took the time to divvy up the Roman world between them. Caesar would have his proconsulship of Gaul extended for another five years and upon completing their term in office, Pompey would be appointed proconsul of Hispania and be allowed to govern *in absentia* while Crassus would receive the governorship of Syria. This would be the last cooperative venture between the three triumvirs. Crassus would soon lie dead in Syria after a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Parthians and the familial bond between Caesar and Pompey would be severed by the death of Julia, Caesar's beloved daughter and Pompey's beloved wife.

With their agreement in hand, each of the triumvirs went about their business, for Crassus and Pompey this meant laying the groundwork for their consular campaign and for Caesar this meant consolidating his hold over Gaul. However, despite his glowing reports to the senate that Gaul was completely pacified, the reality was not so neat and tidy. This time it was the Veneti, a maritime tribe from Brittany who decided to take their shot at avoiding Roman domination. Admittedly, they were in a unique position and had good reason to believe they could resist the Romans, but in the end it was not enough and they too fell under Caesar's sword.

Campaign against the Veneti — 56 BC

The Veneti's unique position was a mastery of the sea that the Romans could not match. Their forts were all built on narrow spits jutting out into the English Channel, nearly impossible to attack on land and connected to endless supplies by sea. If Caesar hoped to put down the rebellion he would have to build a navy. However, the Romans were never great sailors to begin with even on the relatively calm waters of the Mediterranean. The choppy chaos of the English Channel would prove to be one of the most implacable foes Caesar would ever face and on more than one occasion, it threatened to end not just his campaign, but his life.

After an entire summer of being given the run around and losing ships that were no match for the sturdy oak constructions of the Veneti, Caesar finally hit upon the weakness of his enemies: The Veneti ships lacked oars, relying exclusively on sails for maneuverability. Near the end of the year Caesar sent his whole navy, some 200 ships, to attack the main Veneti stronghold. The Veneti were unable to resist the opportunity to crush the Romans and sailed *en masse* to meet them. However, the Romans were prepared and eschewing their failed tactics of ramming and boarding they instead used hooks to tear down the sails of the Veneti ships. This coupled with a fortuitous absence of a strong wind, made the Veneti sitting ducks. The Romans went from ship to ship and though the fighting was long and hard, the outcome was no longer in doubt. The whole of the Veneti navy was destroyed and the tribal leaders on land, deprived of their supply line, were forced to surrender.

Caesar now controlled almost the entire north coast of Gaul but he was not content with stopping at the water's edge. Across the channel lay the mythical island of Britannia which he resolved to invade the following year, both to cut off the aid that had flowed from the island to the rebellious Belgae and Veneti but also to score a massive domestic political victory. Think of the propaganda value — Caesar conquers the ends of the earth. Has a nice ring to it.

However, before he could invade the ends of the earth, Caesar would be forced to engage in a less romantic but arguably more important venture. As it would turn out the Roman public was at least as impressed with Caesar for leading a Roman army into Germania as they were for his later invasion of Britain.

First Rhine Crossing — 55 BC

In 55 BC, German tribes began crossing the Rhine River again and running amok, often encouraged by the local Gauls who hoped to stir up as much trouble for Rome as they could. Caesar was forced to put his British invasion on hold while he headed east to secure the border. What he immediately sensed was that the Germans would have no fear as long as they believed the Rhine was a magical barrier to Roman advancement. So Caesar decided to put lie to that particular myth. However, understanding that such an invasion needed something more spectacular than his legionaries crossing the river on rickety boats, Caesar ordered a bridge be built across the great river. In what is widely acknowledged as one of the great feats in the history of military engineering, Caesar's army designed and built his bridge in just 10 days.

Stable in the rushing water and strong enough to sustain the 40,000 troops that Caesar intended to march into Germania, the bridge was an architectural masterpiece but, more importantly for Caesar's immediate concerns, it terrified the Germans. They had felt completely safe on their side of the river, secure in the knowledge that the Romans a) were afraid of invading Germania b) would be easy targets if they tried to cross the river in boats and c) couldn't build a bridge so fast that the Germans wouldn't be able to mass an army to meet the invaders. However, in the time it took German scouts to notice the bridge and report it to their chiefs, the Romans were already hammering in the final nails. When the next band of scouts arrived to check the progress of the construction, they were forced to immediately turn around and report the unbelievable news that the Romans were already across the Rhine.

The Germans panicked and retreated into the forests. Caesar spent three weeks marching around Western Germany without encountering any resistance. Believing he had made his point he ordered his troops back across the Rhine and the bridge burned. The Germans did not miss the point: Rome could go where it wanted, when it wanted and it was best not to forget that fact.

First Invasion of Britain — 55 BC

Despite the time he had spent on his detour into Germania, Caesar was determined to launch at least a preliminary expedition to Britannia by the end of the year. So with the autumn winds howling and winter fast approaching Caesar set out with 80 ships to find out how much resistance he could expect if he decided to launch a full invasion, or if a full invasion would even be necessary. This first crossing can't really be described as anything but a debacle. Caesar had been unable to squeeze any decent information out of the local traders about where and when to land on the island and what minimal scout work his own officers had done was totally inadequate. Not only did the Romans have no clue how to handle things like tides but at every possible landing site they found themselves met by thousands of British warriors lining the cliffs. Finally, with great difficulty Caesar was able to land his fleet and establish a small beach head. However, as soon as his ships were anchored a storm swept in, smashing the fleet against the rocks.

The beleaguered Caesar made contact with the local tribes and tried to put on a brave face, but it was obvious to anyone with eyes that the Romans posed no threat whatsoever. The local Britons indulged Caesar's pompous demands that they send hostages to secure the goodwill of Rome and returned to their tribes. Caesar didn't even wait for them not to comply, generously agreeing to accept the hostages in Gaul, rather than forcing the Britons to respond immediately. He patched up his fleet as fast as he could and sailed back to Gaul. Only two British tribes actually sent their promised hostages.

Second Invasion of Britain — 54 BC

The next spring Caesar launched a far better planned invasion. The Romans never did get a handle on the tricky tides of the North Atlantic but they were able to land without as much difficulty and establish a proper base. This time Caesar arrived not with 80 ships, but 800 ships. The southern Britons were forced to take the threat more seriously this time but they still proved to be a hard bunch to get a handle on. They all willingly agreed to submit to Rome but took every opportunity to undermine the Roman presence and showed little stomach for the kind of real submission the Romans were used to. The Britons seemed to be treating the Romans as little more than temporary nuisance — on the invaders until they lost interest and went home.

Caesar pressed inland and met with fiercer resistance, but primarily in the form of guerrilla attacks rather than open battle. Eventually, he learned who was directing the resistance and put his stronghold to siege. Failing to land a counterpunch on the Roman camp to draw Caesar away the resistance ended and the besieged tribe agreed to recognize a king of Caesar's choosing. Anxious to get back to Gaul, Caesar left the island in the hands of local allies. It would be another hundred years before Rome returned to fully incorporate Britannia as a province. The expedition had resulted in little material gain but in terms of publicity, the invasion was a huge success for Caesar personally. There was nothing, it seemed, the charismatic general could not do.

Caesar returned to Gaul and settled in for a long winter. His heart was heavy with grief and his mind was wracked by dread at the news he had received while he was in Britain. His daughter Julia had died in childbirth. The death of his only child affected the passionate Caesar mightily, but he further struggled with the implications this had for his alliance with Pompey. With Crassus in Syria, Pompey stood alone as the dominant triumvir in Rome and now had nothing to bind his interests to Caesar's. However, the sullen general did not have long to dwell on his grief or his political future.

Punitive Genocide — 54-53 BC

In northeast Gaul a full legion was tricked out of their winter quarters by supposedly friendly locals, lured into a trap and slaughtered to a man. However, this was news that Caesar would not learn until after he got word that another camp was under siege by the same group, whose ranks now swelled with warriors from all over the country who wanted nothing more than to kill Romans. The besieged camp was led by one of Caesar's ablest commanders Quintus Cicero, brother of the great orator. Quintus had not fallen for the ruse that had lured the slaughtered legion out from their camp, and despite the satisfaction of seeing through the trick, he was now surrounded by a rebel Gallic army and unable to get word through the line that he was under attack. Finally, a slave agreed to slip through and make contact with Caesar in exchange for his freedom. Once alerted Caesar immediately charged out into the winter snows to relieve the besieged legion, arriving just in time. The sight of Caesar's army scattered the rebels and Cicero's legion was saved.

Nearly every soldier trapped inside the liberated camp had been wounded in some fashion or another and Caesar praised them all to the hilt, handing out awards and honors left and right. It was not lost on these men, nor on the men who had done the liberating, that Caesar seemed to genuinely care about the average soldiers under his command. Throughout the campaign, Caesar famously referred to his men not as "soldiers" but as "comrades." These simple acts of familiarity and compassion helped breed in his troops the fanatical loyalty that would prove decisive in the coming civil war. These men were never Roman legionaries, they were Caesar's legionaries.

When the spring of 53 BC came Caesar was single minded of purpose. He brought the full weight of his army down on Northeast Gaul and engaged in a genocidal campaign against the tribes that were behind the assault on Cicero's men and, the Romans had learned with horror, the murder of the tricked legion. Without remorse Caesar slaughtered the men and sold the women and children into slavery. During this year in the field Caesar also built a second bridge across the Rhine to halt aid and comfort that was coming in from Germania. He hoped to achieve not only a measure of revenge, but also signal that Gaul was no longer a free country — that any attack on Rome would be met with the swiftest and most brutal repercussions. In this he was not entirely successful as the brutality of 53 BC proved to those Gauls who still had fight in them that they had better do something now or they would all wind up like their annihilated cousins in the north. However, in a larger sense the campaign was

effective. It galvanized the last of the independent minded Gauls and when Caesar defeated them the following summer, all formal resistance was wiped out with them.

The Triumvirate Splinters

On the cusp of this great victory, Caesar's political fortunes in Rome were quickly spinning out of control. He offered his grandniece Octavia, the sister of the future Caesar Augustus, to Pompey in marriage in a desperate attempt to re-secure their alliance. However, Pompey spurned the offer and instead agreed to wed the daughter of one of Caesar's most hated enemies, a man named Quintus Metellus Scipio. This was not a good sign. On top of that, Marcus Crassus, Caesar's long time benefactor died fighting a disastrous campaign in the east. The triumvirate was literally and figuratively dead.

Vercingetorix's Revolt — 52 BC

However, there was no time to worry about domestic political concerns. In 52 BC, the last great battle of the Gallic Wars was set to be fought. Since he had arrived in Gaul five years before Caesar had effectively used Gallic tribal rivalries to his advantage and avoided ever facing a united front. Now though, with the noose finally closing around their necks the Gauls joined forces under the banner of Vercingetorix a Gallic king who would lead the last stand for his country's independence. Vercingetorix would meet his end after being paraded through Rome in chains during Caesar's triumph and be unceremoniously strangled in a Roman jail cell.

Prior to this ignoble end however he was the last best hope of the Gauls and would cause as much grief to Caesar in one summer as the Roman general had experienced during his entire occupation of the country. In the dead of winter, the Gallic king launched his rebellion by embarking on a scorched earth campaign. The Romans had been living off the land since their arrival, allowing them greater mobility and freedom from worries about protecting a supply line. Now Vercingetorix put as many towns and granaries as possible to the torch. It was cruel and punished his own people as much as it punished the Romans, but this was a time for desperate measures. He was persuaded, however, to spare Avaricum, the greatest city in southern Gaul — a decision he was uncomfortable with and would soon regret. Caesar gathered his scattered legions and headed straight for Avaricum. Despite assurances from the Gallic nobility that Avaricum was impregnable, Vercingetorix was forced to watch helplessly as the city fell after a brutal 30 day siege. Caesar's starving soldiers killed everyone in the city. Most importantly, they had secured enough food to see them through the next few weeks.

The Gauls retreated and as soon as he resupplied his army Caesar followed. A series of feints and counter feints finally saw the Romans chase the Gauls behind the walls of Gergovia. This time, however, overzealous Roman soldiers attacked too early, despite Caesar's order to restrain themselves, and blew the one chance Caesar saw to take the city. Forced to retreat after sustaining serious casualties, the Romans had more to worry about than simply licking their wounds. The defeat at Gergovia had broken the aura of invincibility surrounding Caesar, and tribes across the country, including some of Rome's most steadfast supporters, flocked to Vercingetorix's banner. Caesar was facing the fight of his life. The whole country was in revolt

and if he was forced to retreat to Roman territory, he was sure to be stripped of his command. So rather than fall back to the south, Caesar ordered his shocked troops to move north.

Siege of Alesia — 52 BC

At this desperate hour Caesar caught one of his many lucky breaks. Engaging in a brief battle, little more than a skirmish, the Romans got the better of an attacking Gallic force. The defeat spooked Vercingetorix and rather than staying on the offensive he ordered his army of 80,000 to retreat to the walled city of Alesia. Caesar saw his fortunes change at once. Alesia was a hill fort located between two rivers, and though it would be nearly impossible to storm, it was also nearly impossible to resupply. All he had to do was ring the city and prevent any relief from getting through. After that, it was just a matter of waiting for those trapped inside to surrender.

So Caesar ordered a wall built around the entire city. The Gauls inside launched attacks to try to halt the construction, but the Romans fought them off and kept building. Soon the city was encircled and the waiting game began. However, then word came of a new wrinkle. A relief army, estimated at some 60,000 was on its way. Caesar, thinking fast, and unwilling to lose his opportunity to force Vercingetorix's surrender, ordered a second wall built, this one facing out, toward the oncoming army. Once this wall was completed the Roman army's whole world collapsed to the few hundred yards between the two walls. The game now boiled down to who would relent first. The Romans were not well stocked, but those trapped in Alesia were already starving to death. The commander of the newly arrived Gallic army knew Vercingetorix would be unable to hold out much longer, so he launched a full-scale attack at a weak point in the outer wall. The legions massed to repel the assault but slowly began to lose ground. Fearing that the day and the whole campaign may slipping away, Caesar led his cavalry out from between the walls and circled around behind the Gauls. Suddenly surrounded, the Gauls panicked and broke apart in disarray.

Inside Alesia, Vercingetorix watched with resignation as his rebellion came to an end. There was no hope of lifting the siege now. The next day the Gallic king rode out of the city on his horse and surrendered himself to Caesar hoping to spare as many of his people as possible from reprisals. The siege of Alesia, which ended in October of 52 BC marked the end of organized resistance to Roman rule in Gaul. Caesar had achieved everything he had set out to do — conquering vast new territories for Rome, exploring land heretofore unknown and making himself an incredibly wealthy man. However, as much as he hoped his victories, and bribes, would earn him safe passage back to Rome, I think we all know that it was never meant to be.

In the next chapter we will bring the rest of the players in this greatest of Roman dramas up to that fateful year of 49 BC. While Caesar was in Gaul, Crassus had started a war with, and then been destroyed by, the Parthians. Pompey had slowly moved into the senatorial camp after his consulship ended. Cicero had been banished and then un-banished from the city, while Cato had been forced to take an unwanted command in Cyprus by Clodius, whose free grain program excited the masses, distressed the senate and eventually led to his own murder. The murder would spark riots as rival gangs took to the streets to battle one another for control of the city. Rome was quickly descending into violent anarchy, and when the great general, Caesar, finally arrived and put the city under his thumb many welcomed him not with fear but with relief, never realizing that the stability Caesar promised came at the price of their freedom.

Chapter 42

Meanwhile, Back in Rome...

58 – 50 BC

After completing his conquest of Gaul, Julius Caesar entered into a sort of holding pattern. The senate refused to let him return to Rome until he disbanded his army, but Caesar refused to return unless he was allowed to keep his army. It was a critical moment not just for Caesar but for the fate of the whole Roman world. However, before reaching the final conflict between the senate and Caesar we need to look at developments in Rome while Caesar was in Gaul. Though the war in Gaul is unquestionably the most famous thing to have occurred in the decade, the rest of Rome did not simply stop what they were doing and wait another dispatch from mighty Caesar. Indeed, it would be difficult to understand why Caesar felt he was forced to cross the Rubicon without understanding what had happened in his absence. It was a decade that saw the death of Crassus, after one of Rome's greatest military defeats, the breaking of the triumvirate, and increasing civil unrest in the city as both the populist tribunes and the conservative senate grew more inflexible and radicalized.

Clodius Exiles Cicero and Cato

Near the end of his consulship in 59 BC, Caesar sponsored the adoption of Clodius Pulcher by a plebeian, allowing the flamboyant demagogue to abandon his patrician status and run for the tribunate. This was in retaliation for the sharp attacks Cicero had publicly leveled against Caesar, as Clodius was one of the great orator's bitterest enemies. The whole adoption was completely illegal for a laundry list of reasons, but you may have noticed that the rule of law did not count for much in Rome those days. Once Clodius was in a position of authority, the deal was that he would go after Cicero full bore and make him realize that messing with Caesar was a bad idea. However, once he was off his leash, there was little stopping Clodius from making everyone realize that messing with Clodius was a bad idea.

Immediately upon attaining the tribunate, Clodius passed a law making exile the punishment for killing a Roman citizen without trial. There was no doubt who the intended target of the law was as this was exactly what Cicero had done when putting down the Catiline conspiracy. Once the law was passed Clodius and the growing gang of thugs, with whom he surrounded himself, drummed up popular support for the banishment of Cicero from Rome. At first Cicero could scarcely believe that the gambit would work and turned to his friends in the senate, and specifically to Pompey, to put a stop to it. However, the word had gone out that the triumvirate supported Clodius's vendetta against Cicero. Though neither Caesar nor Pompey, necessarily supported banishing Cicero they felt compelled to follow through on what they had set in motion. When Pompey refused to speak on Cicero's behalf Cicero found himself an exile. In 58 BC, no doubt still reeling in disbelief, Cicero packed up and sailed for Macedonia, unsure if he would ever see Rome again. It was, by his own admission, the lowest moment of his life and he confessed that during his exile, suicide crossed his mind on more than one occasion.

With Cicero out of the way, Clodius next set his sights on Cato. The triumvirate had far fewer misgivings about getting rid of the moralizing teetotaler and embraced Clodius's scheme to remove the powerful senator from Rome. Clodius, who obviously saw politics through a highly personal lens, hatched a plot to take care of two enemies at once. When he was a young man, Clodius, like Caesar, had been taken hostage by Cilician pirates. The young patrician had demanded that the king of nearby Cyprus pay the ransom but the king had refused to come to the aid of this demanding young nobody, earning the lifelong enmity of Clodius, who was now enjoying the

power of being a somebody.

So now, after years of nursing a grudge, Clodius had his revenge. He passed a law stripping Cyprus of its client kingdom status and annexing it officially into the empire. He then nominated Cato as the perfect candidate to govern the new territory, given his well-known administrative skills and reputation for honesty. Cato was flummoxed. He couldn't say no the appointment, but did not want to leave the city at this critical hour. It was clear that Rome was being taken over by lawless thugs who would destroy all that was good and pure about Rome if they were not checked. However, like Cicero before him, he could find no one who would help him avoid this de facto banishment. Cato sailed for Cyprus, the king of Cyprus was deposed and Clodius patted himself on the back.

Clodius Introduces the Grain Dole

For his next trick, Clodius introduced Rome to something that, at the time, was highly controversial (hence the need to get rid of Cato and Cicero) but would soon become the cornerstone of public policy: the free grain dole. The over-population and under-employment in the city was a source of constant worry and tension for middle and upper class Romans. With more than a million people now crammed on top of one another, everyone was aware that if these people were not fed, the richest, most powerful city of the ancient world would likely be consumed by its own hungry citizens. To this end it had been policy since the days of the Gracchi to sell grain at a heavily subsidized price, but Clodius decided to take it one step further. He pointed out to the teeming masses that they all lived in the richest most powerful city in the world and it was a gross injustice that the nobles lived such splendid lives, enjoying all the luxuries that the empire afforded, while they lived in squalor, barely able to feed themselves. Veterans who had fought to win the empire that now sustained the rich deserved better, farmers who had been displaced by slaves so the rich could make more money deserved better, urban citizens who had seen their standard of living deteriorate because of the influx into the city of the former two groups deserved better. They all deserved better.

The mobs were eager to buy what Clodius was selling, because Clodius wasn't planning to sell them anything. He was planning to give them stuff for free. And nothing says popular like free stuff. So Clodius was able to push through his free grain allotments which ultimately served some 200,000 poor citizens of Rome. Augustus would consider repealing the grain dole during his reign, but ultimately decided against it. Once given it is hard to take away and it simply wasn't worth the price of feeding the masses to risk revolution. Free grain was there to stay.

Milo

Despite his efforts to neutralize his enemies, Clodius was not operating in a political vacuum. In 57 BC, a movement began to have Cicero recalled to Rome after just a single year in exile. The faction was led by Titus Annius Milo, a plebeian agitator, who had previously worked in support of Pompey but who now aligned himself with the conservative senate against the triumvirate. Milo was, further, personal friends with Cicero. He was elected tribune alongside Clodius in 57 BC and made it a priority to bring his friend home. The rivalry between Clodius and Milo would define Roman street politics for the next few years. Both controlled gangs of former soldiers and gladiators who could be mobilized at a moment's notice to support this or that proposal. Violent clashes and small scale riots became a frequent feature of Roman life as the heads of these rival gangs fought physically where once words had been the weapon of choice. The degeneration of discourse from verbal sparring to literal sparring would be the catalyst for Pompey's elevation to a near dictatorship.

Milo, despite Clodius's attempt to physically halt the proceedings, managed to lift the judgment on Cicero and in the summer of 57 BC the senator was welcomed back to Italy by an adoring crowd, much to his happy surprise. However, his return to Rome was bitter-sweet. In his absence, Clodius had confiscated Cicero's estates both in the country and on the Palatine hill and had them demolished. While Cicero was returning from Greece, Milo had directed workers to begin rebuilding his friend's home, and the construction site became the scene of multiple violent clashes as Clodius sent in his thugs to disrupt the effort. Eventually, the running battles between Clodius and Milo would turn deadly and one would wind up dead and the other in exile. However, before we get to that we need to turn to Caesar's triumvirate colleagues, who as you'll recall, were preparing themselves to be co-consuls in 55 BC.

Consulship of Pompey and Crassus — 55 BC

The consular election of 56 BC, which saw Crassus and Pompey victorious, would take record amounts of bribery to pull off. Opposition to the triumvirate, it seemed, was unifying and solidifying and it was getting more and more difficult for the three men to simply assert their will. Thus, the consulship of Pompey and Crassus was centered on the question of each man's future. As agreed, they extended Caesar's proconsulship in Gaul for another five years, which would leave him immune to prosecution through 49 BC. This was of the utmost importance as it would get Caesar through the mandated ten year waiting period between consulships. Caesar believed that if he could survive until this second consulship he could do enough in that term to insulate himself from prosecution for the rest of his life. After easing Caesar's troubled mind they looked out for themselves. Crassus would be assigned the governorship of Syria for a period of five years and Pompey would be given Spain for the same length of time.

The two men saw their eventual proconsulships from entirely different perspectives. Pompey, for his part, made sure that he would be allowed to rule his province without actually having to go there. He was no longer a young and ambitious soldier and had already fought his way to the ends of the known world and come back triumphant. He was fast losing interest in the world of war and politics. All he wanted to do now was retire in Rome with his young bride Julia. The governorship of Spain was meant to leave him with a steady income, not to afford him any opportunities for further glory. He was Pompey the Great, what more did he have left to prove?

Crassus on the other hand, though, even older than Pompey, still dreamed of a triumph — something that would finally fill the gaping hole in his record. His youthful exploits at the Battle of the Colline Gate had long been forgotten and his victory over Spartacus had come almost 20 years before. When people thought of Pompey, they thought of his great military victories. When they thought of Crassus, they thought of the fact that they had to pay him rent every month. Great monuments are built for the former, not so much the latter. So in late 55 BC, Crassus set out for Syria to build himself a great army so he could invade Parthia while Pompey was enjoying the benefits of semi-retirement.

Crassus Invades Parthia

Throughout 54 BC, Crassus used his personal wealth to raise seven legions, some 35,000-40,000 troops. At his request, and with Caesar's approval, Crassus's son Publius was released from service in Gaul and rode to meet his father at the head of 1000 Celtic cavalymen. Crassus trained his army, drilled his army, until it was in fighting shape. He couldn't wait to get his expedition moving — identifying the next spring as the latest he wanted to get started. However, Crassus's impatience would prove to be his undoing and lead him to make a disastrous strategic decision right at the outset. The buffer state of Armenia, with which Pompey had secured peaceful relations the previous decade, agreed to help Crassus in his quest to peel off territory from the Parthians. The Armenian king pledged 50,000 troops, the only stipulation was that Crassus had to come north and invade Parthia via Armenia. Basically the king wanted Crassus to swing through and pick up the Armenian army on the way to the front. However, Crassus refused to delay and after crossing the Euphrates River and finding himself welcomed by the Hellenized natives, decided he was better off making immediately for bigger fish rather than going back to get the Armenians.

However, the natives Crassus initially encountered were not so much friendly as they were treacherous. A local chieftain told Crassus that the Parthians were scattered and afraid of the invading Romans, but the chieftain was a Parthian plant, and when he agreed to show Crassus the best route to the great Parthian cities, it is not hard to imagine what happened next. In reality, the Parthians were not scattered and afraid, they were concentrated and confident. The Parthian army headed for Armenia to punish the conspiring Armenian king, while their plant in the Roman army was ordered to lead Crassus around the desert aimlessly. Just to make sure that the Romans did not link up with the Armenians, 10,000 Parthian cavalry were sent south to further harass the legions. It would turn out that the attempt to delay Crassus would prove far more successful than anyone could have dreamed. The 10,000 cavalry was about to crush Crassus's army of some 40,000.

Battle of Carrhae — 53 BC

After being led away from the Euphrates, the Roman army marched day after day through the sweltering desert heart. Morale was low and the troops grumbled that Crassus had no idea what he was doing, no idea where he was going and was going to get them all killed. On all three points they were right. At Carrhae — near the modern border of Syria and Turkey, the Parthian cavalry appeared on the horizon. Ignoring advice about where to fight, when to fight, and how to fight, Crassus ordered his exhausted troops to form up in a giant square with cavalry on each wing. At first the Romans, despite their misgivings about Crassus, were fairly confident. It was after all only 10,000 Parthians. However, of those, 9000 were highly mobile and highly accurate archers, while the other thousand were heavily armored troops called cataphracts.

The Parthian light cavalry opened up the attack. They would charge the Romans at full speed, firing arrows the whole time. Then as soon as they got near the line they would wheel around and speed off, continuing to fire arrows over their shoulder as they went — this last maneuver was called a Parthian Shot or as we know it today, a parting shot. It had the effect of never letting up on the constant barrage of arrows. Crassus kept his men in formation, shields facing all directions and the arrows mostly bounced off harmlessly — but the constant attack took its toll mentally. Crassus's strategy was to simply outlast the arrow supply of the Parthians and hope they would leave the Romans alone after that.

At one point, however, afraid that he would be surrounded Crassus ordered his son to lead out the Celtic cavalry to drive off the circling force. The superior Parthian cavalry, however, led Publius and his men far away from the main Roman force, then suddenly wheeled around and attacked. Helplessly, Crassus watched as his cavalry and his son were slaughtered. Despondent, he fumbled around trying to decide what to do next, eventually coming to the conclusion that he needed to march forward and attack. Before he could make any positive move the armored cataphracts attacked. The exhausted and heat stroked Roman front line was smashed and the whole army split in two. Crassus was forced to order a retreat. Ten thousand of his men were cut off from the rest of the army and cut down.

The Romans withdrew, but were led astray again and again by supposedly friendly locals. Finally, the Parthian commander sent word that he would talk terms with Crassus. The Roman soldiers basically told Crassus to go talk or they would kill him where he stood. Crassus,

completely deflated, agreed. He entered the Parthian camp to discuss peace, but whether by design or accident, a fight broke out and in the melee Crassus was killed. The legions meanwhile, discovered they had been led into a swamp and getting word that their leader had been murdered tried to escape, but the flight was a disaster. Between the battle and the retreats Rome lost some 20,000 troops with another 10,000 taken prisoner. Of the 40,000 who had marched out just weeks before, only 10,000 limped back to Syria under the command of Gaius Cassius — later one of the instigators in the assassination of Julius Caesar.

Impact of the Disaster

It was the worst Roman defeat since the disaster at Cannae during the Second Punic War. More embarrassing than the loss itself, was the capture of numerous legionary eagle standards. It was a source of almost immeasurable shame for these legionary symbols to fall into the hands of the enemy. Caesar Augustus spent a great deal of diplomatic time and energy trying to recover the captured eagles from the Parthians and when he did so, the reaction in Rome was the same as if he had actually won a great battle.

The defeat at Carrhae also firmly solidified in the minds of most Romans that it was folly to try and expand further east. Many had opposed Crassus's mission to begin with and took the loss as proof that Rome ought to stick near the Mediterranean. Mark Antony's later disastrous adventures in the region would further drive home the point that sound policy was living in peaceful coexistence with whatever empire controlled the mountains and deserts of the east. It was not until the Emperor Trajan, 150 years later, that Rome would again risk a war in the east. And even then Trajan's successor Hadrian basically abandoned all the territory Trajan had won, deeming it far too expensive to try and hold. Rome was and would remain a Mediterranean empire.

To Romans at the time, the doomed campaign in the east was defined not by the death of Marcus Crassus but by the death of his son Publius. The young man, too young to even begin his path on the *cursus honorum* had already proven himself to be a good leader while serving in the Gallic Wars and many Romans felt that the early death of this popular and charismatic leader was one of the great tragedies of the day. It is intriguing to wonder what role a formidable Publius Crassus could have played in the coming Civil Wars.

For Caesar the death of Marcus Crassus was a far greater personal tragedy. It had the effect of officially ending the first triumvirate. With Julia's death in 54 BC, the ties that bound Caesar and Pompey were already strained. Crassus's death officially ended the partnership. Caesar attempted to salvage the relationship by offering Pompey his niece Octavia, but Pompey decided to marry Publius Crassus's young widow, who just so happened to be the daughter of one of Caesar's greatest enemies, Quintus Metellus Scipio. The triumvirate was finished.

Rome Turns on Caesar

After this breach, Rome in general began to turn against Caesar. In December 53 BC, a chance passing in the streets of Clodius and Milo led to a fight breaking out among their entourages. In the scuffle Clodius was killed. This not only deprived Caesar of a key ally in the city, but it also sparked a wave of riots. In a display of shocking lawlessness, the supporters of Clodius actually seized control of the senate house and used it as a funeral pyre for their dead leader. So when you go to Rome and visit the forum and discover to your disappointment that you can't actually see the spot where Julius Caesar was assassinated because the senate was meeting somewhere else for a few years, blame Clodius (well at least his supporters. Booooo, Clodius's supporters. Boooo!).

The riots led the senate to reach out to Pompey. A strong hand was needed before things spun out of control. Wary of giving Pompey full dictatorial powers, they instead split the difference and appointed him emergency consul without a colleague. Pompey managed to restore order, but moving beyond the immediate crisis, the senate pushed him to deal with the crisis they all saw looming. Caesar had just emerged triumphant in the Gallic wars and was sitting in Gaul with 50,000 battle hardened veterans. The senate was itching to strip Caesar of his command and punish him for all the terrible things he had done, real or imagined, but obviously Caesar wasn't just going to roll over, so a tense showdown began to brew.

Pompey began by passing a law allowing for retroactive prosecution for bribery, thus putting the senate on firm legal footing to go after Caesar when he returned to Rome. Next the senate demanded that Caesar stand down his legions, now that, by his own admission, the war in Gaul was won. Caesar countered this by saying that was fine as long as he was allowed to stand for consular election in absentia. Pompey responded by answering that no, he would not be granted any such concession and further, he would not be allowed to stand for election at all unless his army was disbanded. Caesar said that was fine, he would give up his army as soon as Pompey gave up his. As Pompey's army was slowly but surely transforming into the army of the republic the senate refused to let Pompey agree to these terms. They demanded Caesar disband his army or he would be declared an enemy of the state.

Here then was the final break. Despite the best efforts of Cicero and the other moderates, the two sides had dug themselves in too deeply. There was no way Caesar was coming back to Rome without the

protection of either his army or the imperium that came with the consulship, and the senate was not going to let him have either of those things. Over the winter of 50 BC, Caesar considered his options. There was a great deal at stake. The personal feud between himself and the senate had grown into a full blown constitutional crisis and there was no way of knowing what the outcome would be of any decision he made. Should he try again to broker a deal through Cicero, recognize that he was outnumbered and capitulate? Or should he just go all out and march back to Rome with his army. I think we all know what Caesar would decide to do.

Chapter 43

Insert Well Known Idiom Here

49 BC

So far we have covered some obscure material which most, except professional scholars, have forgotten or know nothing of. We are now moving into a period so famous that the events that took place have worked their way well into our collective imagination. For the next little while it's going to be all "The die is cast," "I came, I saw I conquered," "Et tu, Brute," and "I come here not to praise Caesar, but to bury him." We're about to delve into events and personalities that are almost universally recognized. That the language of Caesar's civil war still sits on the tip of our tongues is a testament to the massive impact it had on the development of the Western World. What do you say when you want to express that someone has going past the point of no return? Ah yes, you say that they are "Crossing the Rubicon."

Political Standoff

As the winter of 50 BC came to a close, Caesar and the senate had reached an impasse. Caesar refused to obey a direct order from the senate to stand down his army and the senate refused to grant any of the concessions Caesar demanded in exchange for his cooperation. Both sides accused the other of upending the rule of law for the sake of private ambition. Caesar pointed out that the senate did not technically have the authority to order him to give up his command, as his proconsulship did not legally expire for another two years. The senate replied that technically Caesar's entire career was one blatant act of criminality after another and he ought not go around touting legal technicalities as a defense.

To understand what led to this impasse one needs to understand why the relationship between Caesar and the senate had become so acrimonious, and what criminal charges threatened Caesar when his term of office expired.

In his survey, *The Roman Republic*, Michael Crawford makes the point over and over again that after the plebeians were integrated fully into the political process, an oligarchy of wealthy families on both sides of the original class divide found their interests generally aligned. From about the 350s on, and especially after the senate came to dominate the state during the Second Punic War there was a great deal of pressure from within this oligarchy not to sell one another out. For hundreds of years they bred amongst themselves and protected the property and privileges their status afforded them. So even if two old patricians hated each other, one wouldn't turn to the popular assemblies with promises of land reform in order to put pressure on the other. Threats to upend the established order were dealt with swiftly and harshly, usually in the form of social ostracism. To the highly social Romans this was a fate worse than death, and it had the effect of keeping everyone in the upper class on the same page.

However, by the end of the Punic Wars this solidarity began to break down. The long wars with Carthage had decimated the ranks of the old aristocratic families and the upper classes became populated with new men who were new to power and had no great loyalty to the old oligarchs. They identified with the masses and had no compunction about using popular causes as a means to exercise personal power. Marius was a great force in this transition and once he showed how the new game could be played, ambitious men were eager to follow his lead. Suddenly, rather than ignoring the masses, praetors and consuls were proposing land reform and grain doles that

flew in the face of everything the old order stood for. Because what the old order stood for more than anything else was the monopolization of land and trade by a few select families.

Into this environment stepped Caesar, scion of an ancient patrician family, who turned his back on that status to champion popular causes as a way to reach the top of the political ladder. To understand how the senate responded to such treachery we can perhaps take the modern example of Franklin Roosevelt. In H.W. Brand's biography of Franklin Roosevelt called *Traitor to his Class* we can see a great deal of similarity between American upper class hatred of That Man in the White House and the senate's hatred of Caesar. In both cases, charismatic leaders who ought to have been strident defenders of the privileges of the old order instead used their considerable skills to blow those privileges up. The title of Brand's book says it all: they were traitors to their class. Because of this betrayal, the conservative senate hated Caesar. They could see their way of life slipping away and were trying desperately to stem the tide of revolution and here was this enormously talented politician who ought to be helping them not helping them, and instead making things even worse. Furthermore, he seemed to enjoy watching them squirm. So they were constantly vigilant for the moment that they could turn the tables and watch him squirm for a change.

The Charges against Caesar

They finally saw their opportunity as the war in Gaul wound down. Cato and his allies were going to go after Caesar in court as soon as he lost the cloak of immunity that came with holding public office. However, the question is: what was the senate planning to charge him with if he came back to Rome, and what would the punishment be if he were convicted? There were complaints large and small, some frivolous and some not even true, but leading the way were the accurate charges of bribery and his sacrilegious conduct as consul.

Bribery was common practice at the time, so why was Caesar being singled out? Bribery was tolerated as long as everyone involved exercised a little discretion. However, bribery turned from accepted under the table practice to scandal when it came out into the open and Caesar didn't even bother to hide what he was doing. He would brag about not worrying about this or that because he had paid off a tribune or an influential senator. It made everyone crazy. No one had clean hands, except for maybe stodgy old Cato, but Caesar was making a mockery of their gentlemanly agreements. This break in social custom, coupled with the amounts and extent of his bribery made people want teach him a lesson. Was it selective prosecution? Definitely. Did the senate care about the hypocrisy of it all? Not even a little bit. Caesar's brazen public purchase of the electoral system threatened to unmask the democratic façade the oligarchs had built around the republic. They had to do something.

Aside from the bribery issue was the little matter of the entire second half of Caesar's consulship. Bibulus, you'll recall, had devised a clever scheme to stop Caesar's reforms by declaring every remaining day of their shared consulship a holy day and thus closed to public business. You'll also recall that Caesar's reaction to this was to ignore the decree completely. His attitude was to get done what he wanted to get done and worry about the consequences later. Well, later was now and no one had forgotten what he had done. By ignoring the holy days Caesar had committed acts that were not just illegal but were sacrilegious. To the highly religious Romans, Caesar's blasphemy could not go unpunished or it would invite the wrath of the gods on the whole empire.

Caesar Declared Enemy of the State — 50 BC

So Caesar is in Gaul, hated by a large group of the political elite who are going to prosecute him for things that no one could possibly argue he did not do. All he could hope for was leniency but the fact that they hated him seemed to preclude any chance of that. So what's the worst he could expect if he was brought up on charges and found guilty? The worst he probably expected was banishment or fines that would send him to the poor house, but the worst was not the thing that kept Caesar up at night. The thing that kept him up at night was the fairly banal fact that if he was tried and convicted he would be politically marginalized. He had dedicated his life to becoming a man of influence, a man of power, the first man in Rome, and a criminal conviction would erase all of it. In essence, Caesar plunged Rome into chaos, violence and civil war because he was afraid of losing his status. As much as there is to admire about Caesar, we should not forget that he was an enormously selfish man who killed tens of thousands of his fellow citizens because he did not want to retire to a life of obscurity. There is nothing to admire about that.

So it is in that light that we should see Caesar's final reply to the senate's order in the winter of 50 BC to stand down his army. He told them that he could not comply and that if they forced the issue he would defend his honor by any means necessary. The senate, even the moderates, were incensed by these fighting words and felt compelled to follow through on their threats. Caesar was declared an enemy of the state.

Mark Antony

In the senate house that day were a number of Caesar's supporters who argued loudly that this was unjust and beyond the pale. When the majority moved to expel Caesar's allies, one in particular raised a tremendous commotion. He had been elected tribune for that year and when the guards came to remove him and his promised veto, he shouted that he was sacrosanct and that to lay hands on him was to invite the wrath of the gods. However, the senators had heard enough and pitched the troublemaker out onto the street. The tribune dusted himself off and immediately headed north to Caesar's camp. Upon his arrival Caesar displayed the tribune's bruises to his assembled troops as proof of the senate's evil ways. I fight to defend the people of Rome, he said, while the senate viciously attacks your representatives. Look at what they have done and ask yourself: whose side are you on?

Now of course, the aggrieved tribune in question was one Mr. Marcus Antonius, better known as Mark Antony. He was no great friend of the people and never had been. He had been born into a wealthy plebeian family and cared very little for things beyond his own base pleasures. He loved wine, women and gambling and had spent his youth endlessly carousing in the streets of Rome with his friends, causing trouble and running up massive debts. He seemed destined to spend his life as a no account, spoiled little rich boy but as it turned out, he was called to Syria to serve in the cavalry and immediately distinguished himself as one of the finest officers in the east. He was a crude and reckless disaster in his private life, but put a helmet on him, give him a few men and point him at the enemy and he was able to accomplish extraordinary things. His mother was first cousin with Caesar and in 54 BC the young officer was attached to the great general's staff in Gaul. Though he was almost 20 years Caesar's junior the two struck up an immediate friendship. In Antony Caesar seems to have found not just another accomplice or temporary ally or partner, but a true friend. Antony would spend the next ten years as Caesar's most trusted commander and a dogged defender of his interests wherever Caesar sent him, for example, to Rome to serve as tribune in 50 BC. Today he showed off his bruises and stirred the troops into an anti-senate frenzy. He knew his role and played it well.

Crossing the Rubicon — 49 BC

Having been declared an enemy of the state for refusing to surrender his army, Caesar knew it would be only a matter of time before Pompey would be ordered north to take him. His only real hope was to pre-empt the Senate's inevitable attack by marching audaciously straight for Rome at lightning speed. Maybe the unexpected invasion would cause enough chaos in the city that Pompey would find himself unprepared for a fight, forcing the old general strategically to withdraw from Rome. Caesar did not feel he even had time to wait for reinforcements from Gaul, so on January 10, 49 BC, Caesar ordered the one legion he had on hand, the thirteenth, to follow him across the tiny Rubicon river which marked the southern border of Cisalpine Gaul into Italia proper, an overt act of treason. Not only was it illegal for a general to lead an army out of the province he governed, it was doubly illegal to take an army into the home peninsula. Caesar knew what he was doing when he ordered the thirteenth across, but not what the final outcome would be. Famously, watching his troops wade into the river, he said "The die is cast." They were all in the hands of fate now, whatever her fickle verdict turned out to be. Initiating a civil war by invading Italy with a single legion might have been insane but if they were all in fate's hands anyway, how does the expression go? Fortune favors the bold?

Neither the senate nor Caesar had access to Roman history books to tell them that Caesar's decision to cross the Rubicon would mark the end of the republic and the beginning of the imperium and we shouldn't ascribe motives to anyone beyond what the immediate context merits. Even the senate, whose rhetoric clearly signaled that they believed Caesar to be a dire threat to the republic couldn't possibly have known that they would be right. The republic had survived the Gracchi, Marius and Sulla — Caesar was cut from the same cloth but had not those men come and gone while the republic remained? So Caesar knew when he crossed the river that he was sparking a civil war and that if he was going to survive he was going to have to seize power, but he did not know that he would set the precedent for 500 years of emperors. Standing there on the banks of the Rubicon on that cold January morning, Caesar was thinking about how best to approach Rome and what resistance he might face from his fellow countrymen. He was thinking about his supply lines and whether to overwhelm Italy or detour to Spain to cut off Pompey's armies there so they couldn't reinforce his opponent. Was he thinking that in 2000 years the Russians would be ruled a Tsar and the Germans by a Kaiser. That in the future his name would literally be synonymous with autocracy? Probably not. He was marching into

Italy with a single legion to challenge the greatest state in the ancient world. He had other things on his mind.

Pompey Withdraws from Rome

The reaction in Rome was exactly what Caesar hoped it would be. The senate heard that he was invading and immediately fell over themselves calling for Pompey to save them. The old general had two legions at his disposal, but critically, no one seemed to know how large a force was marching on Rome. The last time Pompey checked Caesar had only the thirteenth with him, surely he was not foolish enough to invade with just a few thousand men. It was safe to assume that the outlaw general had been reinforced. Pompey's imagination got the better of him, as he pictured Caesar coming south at the head of ten veteran legions. It would be suicide to stay in Rome. So Pompey, playing right into Caesar's hands, ordered an immediate withdrawal. He would take his legions, and anyone else who cared to come with him to Brundisium. From there they would sail for Greece. The senators were appalled, but Pompey calmly explained that the east was where he had made his name and he had a string of clients willing to support their patron at the drop of a hat. Caesar could have Rome for now, but the occupation would be short lived. Pompey would gather a massive army in Greece and then return to Italy to crush the upstart. They were welcome to stay in Rome and await Caesar's arrival if they wished but he was going to Greece. The senate, almost to a man, followed. They didn't even bother to lock the gates behind them.

On his way south Caesar found most of the Italian towns amenable to his approach, which he considered a blessing, as he desperately wanted there to be no resistance whatsoever. Despite the propaganda he was issuing about how he was the victim and the true defender of the people and the Republic, he knew that he was committing treason. If he was going to skate through this he would need his fellow citizens to be complicit in whitewashing his *coup d'état*. The last thing he needed was to be seen killing and pillaging peaceful Italian towns. At one point, a city garrisoned by a conservative general did attempt to hold out but Caesar managed to convince him to surrender without spilling blood. When the general and his captains emerged from behind the walls, they fully expected to be executed. However, Caesar released them, going so far as to tell them they could go to join Pompey and continue to fight him if that was what they thought was best. Everyone was shocked by this display of leniency — Caesar didn't even make them promise not to oppose him in the future. However, Caesar knew exactly what he was doing. He was weaving a spell of legitimacy around himself — and the spell would only work if he didn't give anyone an excuse to point out that he was engaged in criminal conquest. There could be no martyrs. He was the friend of

everyone, even his enemies. It exasperated both his friends and enemies but the people caught in the middle would remain on the sideline as long as Caesar did nothing to provoke them.

The Race to Brundisium

With Pompey headed south with a head start, Caesar's main motivation at this point was not to make straight to Rome, but rather to march for Brundisium as fast as possible and try to cut off access to the port city. If he could keep Pompey from reaching Greece, he might be able to force a resolution to the conflict before the end of the year. As the two armies raced for Brundisium, envoys from both camps traveled back and forth exchanging proposals and counter-proposals to secure a peace before things got out of hand. More than anything Caesar wanted to meet privately with Pompey. If the two of them could get together alone, he was sure they could hash out a peace. However, the senate was adamant that Pompey not agree to the terms. They were certain the dynamic Caesar would convince Pompey to sell out the senate and renew their previous alliance. All attempts at talks were foiled.

Despite Caesar's double time pace, Pompey reached Brundisium first and fortified the city. Caesar arrived not long after and laid siege — and even attempted to blockade the port but his efforts failed and ships from Greece were able to spirit Pompey and the senate away. Caesar was now in control of Italy but it was a hollow victory. The entire republican governing apparatus had fled the peninsula. Even with his mastery of propaganda, it would be hard for Caesar to convince anyone that his control of Italy was legitimate.

Caesar Enters Rome — April 49 BC

However, there was no time to worry about that now. Caesar wheeled around and headed to Rome, marching into the city in April of 49 BC. It was awkward marching his army into the unprotected city. There was no resistance but there was also no support. He called a meeting of the senate to plead his case, but it was a sparsely attended affair and those who remained in the city at all were nobodies anyway. Everyone that mattered was gone. He received a much more enthusiastic welcome when he addressed the popular assemblies, promising them cash and grain under his administration. However, they immediately turned on him when he looted the public treasury to help pay his soldiers. To make matters worse, a stubborn tribune made a point of physically standing between Caesar and the treasury doors. After making such a big deal about the treatment of Mark Antony, Caesar's hypocrisy was in full display as he threatened to kill the obstinate tribune if he did not clear a path.

However, he didn't have the time right now to worry about his popularity in the capital, there would be time enough for that later. Meanwhile, he was astute enough to know that he had to leave the city before he damaged his reputation any more than he had already. This was a political conflict as much as it was a military affair, and losing on either front would cripple his long term goals. Though he had done himself no favors with his conduct in Rome, military victory would go a long way toward solving his political problems. Leaving Mark Antony in charge of the city, Caesar led his men out the gate.

Caesar Neutralizes Spain

Caesar decided to put off chasing after Pompey for the present and instead resolved to neutralize any support that might come in from Spain. In an amazing 27 days, Caesar marched his legions from Rome to Spain, picking up additional forces in Gaul along the way. He entered Hispania with some 30,000 troops, intent on taking the Spanish legions out of the fight before Pompey could figure out how to put them to use. He had expected to meet limited resistance from Pompey's five legions there but the commanders left in charge had no intention of rolling over for Caesar. When the two forces met in battle briefly for an initial skirmish, Pompey's legions showed surprising determination in the field, throwing back Caesar's men, who had grown used to easy victories.

However, success in the field would not be enough. The local Spanish tribes concluded that if they helped Caesar win control of the empire, he might repay the favor by easing the burden of servitude imposed by Rome. The Pompeian forces soon found themselves bottled up without access to allies or supplies. To prevent any escape Caesar camped his army practically on top of the enemy and soon soldiers from both sides began to slip back and forth between the opposing camps to drink and commiserate over the miserable lot they had all drawn. Fighting fellow-Romans was not why any of them had joined up. In particular, the foot soldiers in the Pompeian legions were jealous of Caesar's men who had grown rich being led by the great general while they wasted away supporting a pack of rich old men who didn't care about them anyway. It didn't help that when the Pompeian commanders cracked down hard on the fraternization, Caesar turned a blind eye to the enemy soldiers drinking in his own camp. Soon enough, the Pompeian commanders, out of food and supplies, joined in their soldiers' dissatisfaction. They weren't going to starve to death defending the honor of a bunch of senators. They surrendered and when Caesar disbanded the defeated legions, the vast majority of them turned right around and signed up to fight for the man who had got the better of them. Stronger than ever, Caesar marched back to Italy.

First Dictatorship

This time when he arrived in Rome in December 49 BC, things went quite a bit better. Allies had managed to formalize an appointment to the office of dictator, giving Caesar legal powers he had not had previously. However, unlike Marius and Sulla who had used their powers to murder their enemies, Caesar showed amazing restraint, turning his attention away from revenge and toward the grain supply problems and economic chaos caused by the civil war. Having quickly reorganizing the logistics and finances of the state, Caesar resigned the dictatorship, declaring his intention to serve merely as a consul, which, he reminded everyone, was all he wanted anyway. The citizens of Rome were amazed and this ostensible self-effacement did much to repair the damage he had done in his first tour of the city.

Fortune Favors the Bold

However, he would not be staying in Rome for long. Now a consul, with at least a claim to legitimacy, Caesar headed to Brundisium with seven legions. Pompey had spent the year gathering a massive international army and it was certain that in the spring they would be pouring across the Adriatic. Most troubling for Caesar, who knew his best shot lay in taking the fight to Pompey in Greece, was the fact that Pompey had some 600 ships patrolling the Adriatic, an impassible blockade if Caesar played it by the book. So Caesar threw out the book and ordered an unprecedented January crossing. If not for their fanatical loyalty, Caesar might have faced a mutiny but instead his soldiers jumped into the crazy plan with relish. Even crazier, Caesar only had enough ships for about half his troops. He would have to send one convoy across, hope it could run the blockade, survive the dangerous seas, and hold a beachhead totally outnumbered in enemy territory. The odds of making it across unscathed one time were long, but Caesar then planned to do it all a second time to bring over the rest of his troops. Fortune had better favor the bold.

Pompey's fleet, ironically led by Caesar's old consular rival Bibulus, was completely unprepared for the January crossing and Caesar led the first wave across intact and unchallenged. Enraged and embarrassed, however, Bibulus was prepared for the second wave and prevented them crossing. Caesar's old nemesis died not long after and it was remarked that he had exerted himself so much in the wintry seas that he had literally worked himself to death. However, he had left Caesar with half an army on the far side of the Adriatic, a fine parting gift from a man who had for so long been a thorn in Caesar's side.

Chapter 44

Caesar Triumphant

48 – 47 BC

Caesar was in a precarious position on the far side of the Adriatic with only half his army. The rest of his men had been turned back by the naval blockade led by Bibulus, who died denying the second half of his old enemy's army an easy crossing.

Pompey, with his well-supplied and much larger army (now numbering some 45,000) made no attempt to attack Caesar right away, even with the latter at half strength. He knew that Caesar was in a bad position and would soon discover that food for his men and horses would be hard to come by in this hostile country. Let the rebels starve. The best case scenario was that they would surrender eventually and no more Roman blood be spilled. The worst case scenario was that they would refuse to give up and Pompey's well fed army would crush Caesar's exhausted and starving troops. The smart play was to wait. The contrasting styles of the two generals could not be more apparent during the coming campaign. Pompey was careful, methodical and well organized. He had no need to take risks because time and numbers were on his side. Caesar on the other hand was taking wild risks every step of the way. I think ninety-nine times out of a hundred the Pompey model beats the Caesar model, but every so often that one shot pops up. Caesar might have been one of the most brilliant generals of the ancient world, but he was also one of the luckiest.

Battle of Dyrrachium — 48 BC

This luck was well on display when the two armies finally did meet at Dyrrachium in May 48 BC. In the months after his landing Caesar used every channel he could think of to secure a truce with Pompey, from the highest diplomatic overtures to sending legionaries to the outskirts of Pompey's camp to try and get the foot soldiers on both sides to agree that fighting each other was madness. Caesar pursued peace not only because he wanted to build the case that he was not the aggressor, but he was also in no position to actually win a battle. It was this latter fact that kept Pompey and the senate from taking Caesar's overtures seriously. As the winter slogged on, things were not looking good for Caesar; not only were his men struggling on a subsistence diet but he began to suspect that his allies in Italy were intentionally delaying the launch of the reinforcements Bibulus had turned back. Was he being betrayed? Had he foolishly rushed to his own destruction? A man of action, Caesar was unable to hold still and even attempted to cross back across the wintry sea to fetch his missing troops but was turned back by a storm. He was left to brood in his tent wracked with doubts about his position and the decisions he had made.

However, just as he was beginning to lose heart Mark Antony boldly arrived across the Adriatic with the legions that had been waiting in Brundisium. Antony might have been crass, vulgar and an unrepentant hedonist but he was a brilliant soldier and Caesar's most loyal captain. There was no way he was going to hang his general out to dry, even if more than a few people had whispered in his ear that he ought to do just that. When spring came the reinforcements linked up with Caesar, bringing his numbers up to a respectable 15,000.

Now at full strength and with Antony at his side Caesar felt more confident about taking the fight to Pompey. By May, the senate's army was camped just south of Dyrrachium, a port city which lay directly across the Adriatic from Brundisium in modern Albania. In the dating for the rest of the war I'm going to use the months the battles actually took place rather than the recorded historical dates. In just a few years Caesar would reset the Roman calendar to reflect the drift caused by centuries of missing leap days, so the Battle of Dyrrachium, which was recorded to have taken in place in July, was, in reality mid-May. Just as Pharsalus really took place in June, not August. The difference in dates may seem trivial, but to understand Pompey's hope that he would be able to starve Caesar into submission, you have to understand that everything took place before the harvest season, not after it, as the misaligned old calendar implied.

Pompey was camped in a strong position with the sea (and a link to endless supplies) at his back, surrounded by steep hills. No direct assault was possible, so Caesar decided to try and recreate some of his success at Alesia and hem Pompey in. He ordered the same men who had built him a bridge across the Rhine in 10 days to build a wall in a giant arc starting at the sea north of Pompey's camp, running up and down the hills to the east and then wrapping back around and connecting to the Adriatic in the south. If he was unable to prevent Pompey's access to food, he could with the wall cut off Pompey's access to fresh water and the pastureland his cavalry needed to feed their horses. Pompey responded by building his own parallel wall and trench system to keep Caesar's forces out in case they tried an open assault. Caesar notes in his commentaries on the civil wars that the two generals were essentially inventing entirely new ways to wage war as they went along. The ensuing weeks of siege and skirmishes fought in the no man's land between the two walls has often been compared to the modern trench warfare of World War I, rather than a classical era infantry battle. Men would launch themselves over their respective walls and attack, only to be repulsed by the superior defenses they assaulted. They would return to the safety of their own walls and then the whole bloody drama would be played out in reverse.

The stalemate was broken when a few Gallic officers defected to Pompey and brought with them information about the weak points in Caesar's wall. Pompey had run his side of the war as conservatively as possible but he could not ignore this opportunity. He pointed his men at the spots identified by the defectors and attacked immediately. Caesar tried to plug the hole but failed. He lost some thousand troops in the fighting and was forced to abandon his wall and retreat. However, whatever initiative Pompey had shown by attacking was immediately negated by his hesitation to pursue Caesar's fleeing army. The old general let Caesar's reputation for cleverness trip him up and he convinced himself that Caesar was trying to lure him into a trap by withdrawing. In fact, there was no trap, just a pack of disorganized troops running away after being beaten. Collecting himself far inland Caesar was amazed that he had managed to escape the day in one piece. He commented to one of his officers, "Today the victory had been the enemy's, had there been anyone among them to gain it."

Caesar regrouped his army and marched inland trying to put some distance between himself and Pompey. He had been badly shaken by the defeat at Dyrrachium but the fight had by no means gone out of

him or his men. Some in the senatorial camp urged Pompey to make straightaway for Italy and retake Rome but Pompey wisely understood that this was not a battle of territory, this was a battle of will. The objective was not to control Rome, it was to defeat Caesar. Anything less would be a false summit on the way up the mountain.

Battle of Pharsalus — June 48 BC

By June, Caesar had been chased across northern Greece and was encamped near the town of Pharsalus in Thessaly, just on the other side of the mountains from the famous Thermopylae pass. He now had about 20,000 troops all told, stronger than he had been but numerically still no match for the 45,000 Pompey had encamped five miles to the northwest. Pompey held the high ground and all the advantages of being in friendly country and so was content to starve Caesar into submission, but he was surrounded by the senate-in-exile who pressed him to attack and end the war once and for all. Every day Caesar would march his army out onto the plain to offer battle, desperate for a conclusive fight but Pompey would always decline. After a few days of light skirmishes though, he finally gave in to pressure from the senate and marched out in full force. He might have had misgivings about whether it was a good idea but if it was a battle the senate and Caesar wanted, a battle is what they would get. The senate was overjoyed as they looked past the battle to a post-Caesar world. They argued in their tents about who would become pontifex maximus, who would be consul in the next year, how Caesar's estates would be divided. Everything, it seemed, but the battle itself, which was obviously a foregone conclusion. Caesar was not so distracted.

The two armies were lined up with a river on Caesar's left and Pompey's right making any attempt to flank the other on that front a non-starter, so both commanders looked to Caesar's right as the center of the action. Pompey massed all of his cavalry on that flank and intended to smash through Caesar's weaker horsemen and then surround the smaller army. However, Caesar immediately understood what Pompey's deployment meant and peeled off a cohort of men from each of his three lines and angled them as a fourth line as backup for his cavalry. He deployed this fourth line under cover of dust and the marching of his light skirmishers so Pompey would not realize the additional wall of infantry existed.

The battle began when Caesar ordered his first line in a frontal assault on Pompey's infantry. However, Pompey had ordered his own troops to stand fast. Standard tactics of the time dictated that both sides run headlong at each other and meet in the middle but Pompey's plan was to force Caesar's veteran fighters to run the whole way giving his own less experienced troops a slight advantage. However, that veteran experience did not just mean they were better fighters, it also meant they were more disciplined. When Caesar saw Pompey's troops staying put, he signaled his centurions to halt the charge just short of spear range to catch their breath. It is no small thing to halt

the charge of an entire army when you have just whipped them into a murderous frenzy but Caesar had trained his men well. When he said “stop”, they stopped. Only when they were sufficiently rested from their sprint did Caesar gave the order to close the final distance. Just like that, his men turned the murderous frenzy back on and threw themselves against Pompey’s line. The Battle of Pharsalus had begun.

With the two infantries engaged, Pompey ordered his cavalry to break through according to the plan. They had no problem driving off Caesar’s smaller cavalry, but when they cleared out the enemy horse they suddenly found themselves confronted with an unexpected line of heavy infantry. This time it was Caesar’s turn to defy convention. Usually when confronted by charging cavalry, infantrymen would hurl their spears and then try to hack at the legs of the riders with their short swords, but Caesar ordered his men to hold onto their spears and use those to attack the heads of the riders. Totally surprised by this new tactic Pompey’s cavalry was completely thrown off and pulled up short, trying to avoid being stabbed in the face by spears. In just a few minutes Caesar’s fourth line had scattered the charging cavalry, and as soon as they had the battle was as good as over. The fourth line charged forward and was able to sweep around behind Pompey’s infantry. Assaulted now on two fronts, Pompey’s less experienced army panicked and decisive battle of the civil war turned quickly from titanic struggle for the future of Rome to complete and utter rout.

The End of Pompey

Pompey himself seems to have snapped mentally when he saw his cavalry shattered and fled the battlefield, leaving his army to fend for itself. Seeing Pompey run ended any notion that the day might somehow be salvaged and it was every man for himself. Senators who had just that morning been splitting up the inevitable spoils of victory now scattered in every direction. Caesar did not linger over his victory in the field and immediately charged for Pompey's camp, hoping he could catch his defeated rival and finalize a peace. However, despite his speed he could not get there in time. Pompey had gathered up his family (who had been with him since his flight from Rome) and abandoned the camp. He loaded as much gold as he could but was forced to leave behind most of his possessions when word came that Caesar was headed straight for him. He went so far as to throw off his general's cloak and disguise himself as a common camp follower to avoid capture. Pompey the Great, who had fought his whole career for honor and glory was reduced by defeat to a pathetic shadow his former self, abandoning his troops and running for his life.

Maybe that's too harsh a judgment. It was not for nothing that Pompey fled for Egypt and not for nothing that he made sure he took with him as much gold as he could. The senate had an ally in King Juba of Numidia and Pompey's plan was likely to gather another army in North Africa, where allies of Caesar had just been defeated in that sub-theater of the greater civil war. However, it was not to be. Court ministers in Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, learned that Pompey was headed their way and resolved to curry favor with Caesar by assassinating his enemy. When Pompey arrived on the Egyptian coast, he was greeted by a small skiff that was to take him to shore. However, as soon as he was on board and separated from his bodyguards, the Egyptian welcoming party attacked. They stabbed Pompey repeatedly, murdering him on the shores of Egypt — the second triumvir to meet an ignominious end after a life spent chasing greatness.

Caesar's Mercy

When Caesar heard the news, he was enraged. The conspiring ministers in Alexandria could not have been more wrong about what Caesar wanted and their clever plan backfired. Rather than making a friend in Caesar, they had just cemented him as a furious enemy.

Caesar's whole posture had always been one of the magnanimous victor. The generous statesman who was forever pardoning his enemies. After the Battle of Pharsalus, a whole contingent of senators decided that running in order to keep up the fight was pointless and supplicated themselves before Caesar, expecting the worst but hoping for the best. Caesar pardoned them all and declared it his greatest desire to heal the divisions within the state and reunite Rome as one body. Among those who begged forgiveness was Marcus Brutus, son of Caesar's old mistress Servilia, whom Caesar had long regarded affectionately as a step-son. He welcomed Brutus back to his side and told him to forget the past, that together they would help build a new future for Rome. This was exactly how he had intended to handle his old friend Pompey the Great when he caught up with him.

So you can imagine Caesar's reaction when he landed in Alexandria in autumn 48 BC, hot on Pompey's heels and instead of receiving information on which direction his rival had gone, he was instead presented with Pompey's head. The assassination denied Caesar his planned public relations *coup de grâce* of pardoning Pompey and asking that he serve beside him as together they repaired Rome and made the empire even greater than it had been before the civil war. When he saw the head he wept bitter tears and to everyone's shock ordered that it be buried with full honors. The ashes of Pompey's body were handed over to his grieving widow, who was allowed to return to Rome and perform the funeral rights becoming for a great hero. When he was done mourning his old partner and one-time son-in-law, Caesar turned to the ministers who had engineered the assassination. They were in big trouble.

Cleopatra

Alexandria had been founded in 334 BC by Alexander the Great and since that time it had grown to become one of the most important cities of the Ancient World — nearly as wealthy and populous as Rome itself. When Alexander died, his domains had been divided among his former captains, with Egypt going to the general Ptolemy. Since then the Ptolemaic dynasty had ruled the Nile from the growing cosmopolitan capital of Alexandria. They made no effort to integrate with the locals and rarely left the safety of their palaces. However, with the death of Ptolemy XII in 51 BC, the ruling dynasty was fractured. The dead king had decreed that his son and daughter ought to be co-rulers, in the Egyptian tradition, but the same court ministers who would later assassinate Pompey had decided that 10 year old Ptolemy XIII would be far easier to control than his 18 year old sister Cleopatra and worked diligently to marginalize her. However, Cleopatra was perceptive and, seeing that she was the target of palace intrigue did something totally radical: she turned to the local Egyptians for support. She became the first of the Ptolemies to learn Egyptian and often took part in the local religious festivals in her role as queen. By ingratiating herself with the locals, the queen became even more dangerous to the ministers controlling her brother and so, by the time Caesar arrived in Egypt, a full blown civil war was underway with Cleopatra exiled from the capital, leading an army of local Egyptians. However, at that time in Egypt, support from the locals did not count for nearly as much as support from the Greeks in Alexandria, and her position was dicey at best.

By killing Pompey though, the ministers behind the weak willed Ptolemy XIII made a critical mistake, causing Caesar, in his disgust, to turn away from the young king they controlled and look for other allies in Egypt for support. Cleopatra fitted the bill perfectly. So, rather than return to Rome and begin consolidating his power there, Caesar announced his intention to stay in Alexandria and settle the civil war. However, placing an ally on the throne was not Caesar's only reason for staying in Egypt. With the rise of Rome, the Ptolemies maintained the independence of Egypt by issuing massive bribes to influential Romans, which in time included Crassus, Pompey and Caesar. Caesar reminded Ptolemy XIII that the last round of payments promised by his father had in no way been forgotten just because the old king had died. Ptolemy's ministers did everything they could to try to convince Caesar to leave, promising payment as soon as he was back in Rome but Caesar would have none of it. He was more than content to wait for payment and in the meantime he could help them solve their little civil war.

He called for Cleopatra to return to the royal palace to help sort out the conflict but knowing that if she were to simply appear at the gates it was likely that her brother's allies would have her killed before she could make it to the relative safety of Caesar's company. So she famously hid in what amounted to a laundry bag and had a loyal slave smuggle her into the palace. Caesar was immediately taken by the cunning young queen after she slipped through danger in such dramatic fashion. Declaring only to be executing the will of the dead Ptolemy XII Caesar re-elevated Cleopatra to her position as co-ruler and not long afterwards the 21-year old queen for reasons of either politics or true affection became Caesar's mistress.

Alexandrian Revolt

The powers behind Ptolemy XIII, however, were not going to take this lying down and concluded they were going to have to expel the Romans by force. Caesar had brought with him to Alexandria only a single understaffed legion of some 4000 infantry and around 800 cavalry. Reinforcements were on the way, but they were still weeks out. So if the ministers were planning to drive Caesar out, they needed to do it before the rest of his army arrived. So they whipped the local Alexandrians into a frenzy, declaring that Caesar was planning to make Egypt a province, depriving them all of the liberty to which they had grown accustomed. Nearly the entire city rose up in revolt and besieged the royal palace, which was held by Caesar and his men. What followed was weeks of bitter street fighting as Caesar was forced to try to conquer and hold the neighborhoods around the palace house-by-house and block-by-block. Nothing in their long careers prepared the Romans for the rigors of urban warfare. The cavalry was useless and traditional troop deployments were unworkable. Their only advantage was that they were tougher and more disciplined soldiers than their opponents, and were able to withstand barrages from the locals as they moved to eradicate pockets of resistance. Eventually, the Romans leveled whole blocks to create a no man's land that would be suicidal for the Alexandrians to try to cross.

Battle of the Nile — 47 BC

The ticking clock was at the forefront of the Alexandrians' minds. While Caesar needed only to hold out until reinforcements arrived, the Alexandrians needed to win before their arrival, but no matter how hard they tried, they couldn't break the Roman resistance. Caesar was able to maintain access to supplies by winning a naval battle in the harbor, but suffered casualties he could not afford in an ultimately successful but brutal assault on Pharos Island, home to one the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Great Lighthouse of Alexandria. Finally, in January 47 BC, word came that Roman reinforcements had completed their overland march and were on the borders of Egypt. Caesar slipped his besieged men out of the palace under cover of night, and along with a contingent of Cleopatra's Egyptian army joined with the newly arrived legions to form an army of some 20,000. The combined force assaulted the fort of young Ptolemy's army, which also numbered around 20,000. Used to fighting severely outnumbered, facing an army merely equal in size was a rare treat for Caesar's legions. The Battle of the Nile was won easily by the Romans. Cleopatra was placed back on the throne alongside her younger brother who would reign in a subordinate role as Ptolemy XIV.

Caesar though never had any intention of annexing Egypt. The wealth of Alexandria in the hands of a now thoroughly anti-Roman citizenry would be a fertile center for rebellion no matter how loyal a governor Caesar installed. Better to leave it as a client kingdom with Cleopatra in charge. The queen understood that she owed her position to Caesar and Caesar alone, so he knew she might be the one person on earth whom he could trust not to rebel the first chance she got. However, official province or not, Egypt was now firmly under Roman control. The Hellenistic dynasty of the Ptolemies that had ruled since Alexander the Great was for all intents and purposes broken. Rome's full encirclement of the Mediterranean was nearly complete.

While Caesar was taking control of events in Egypt, elsewhere the empire was disintegrating into chaos. The remaining senatorial forces were re-grouping in Numidia, Mark Antony's ruthlessly debauched management of Rome was turning the city into a hell hole, his appointed governor of Spain was so corrupt and brutal that the natives so recently won to Caesar's banner were in revolt, and every territory Rome had ever pacified was planning to declare independence at the first opportunity. Nonetheless, Caesar took a month off in early 47 BC to enjoy a leisurely cruise up the Nile with Cleopatra.^[5] In the next chapter, Caesar will go back to the exhausting business of consolidating power over the Roman empire,

but for now let's leave him be. I think he's earned a vacation.

Chapter 45

The End of the War

47 – 46 BC

In early 47 BC, after settling the civil war in Egypt and firmly establishing Roman dominance over the Nile, Caesar took a month long cruise up the great river with Cleopatra. Though no doubt relaxing, it was not simply an uncharacteristic vacation. Caesar took with him some 400 ships — the slow moving entourage was meant to display the power of Rome to any Egyptian who might have been planning resistance to the new regime. Caesar had a dozen major problems to deal with as he reshaped the political map of the Ancient World, and he did not need a revolt in newly pacified Egypt to become one of the them.

Of those major problems, his greatest lay near the remains of old Carthage where the senatorial forces that had fled from Pharsalus were regrouping under the command of Metellus Scipio, who was building a massive army with the help of Numidian King Juba. The problem was in fact so big that Caesar knew he could not face it right away. His men were exhausted, the cash supply was running dangerously low, and the entire eastern half of the empire seemed ready to revolt at a moment's notice. Furthermore, between the Battle of Pharsalus and the war in Alexandria he had basically lost contact with Rome itself. The population, who had once received regular glowing reports from Caesar during the Gallic Wars, had now gone more than six months without any updates at all. Before he could face his enemies in North Africa, Caesar would have to solidify his hold over every other corner of the empire, including the capital city itself.

Vini Vidi Vici

So rather than marching west Caesar took the road east out of Alexandria. His plan was to travel up the eastern Mediterranean coast, cross Asia Minor into Greece and sail back across the Adriatic into Italy. Along the way, he would collect money, allies, soldiers and support. He would also eliminate anyone who opposed him. For the most part though, there was no opposition. Kings who had been clients of Pompey readily embraced Caesar as their new patron. Roman garrisons scattered across the east, most previously allied with Pompey, repudiated their old general and begged clemency from Caesar, who was more than happy to grant it.

However, it was not all easy going. Pharnaces II, the son of Rome's old enemy Mithridates, had returned to Pontus and thought it right that he should be king. However, to stake his claim he had been forced to battle with the Roman garrison that had been stationed there to keep an eye on Caesar's interests in the region. The Roman garrison, distracted by a desire to make for Egypt and reinforce their embattled general had not taken the fight seriously and Pharnaces had beaten them soundly. Now in the great game of power politics, Caesar might have let this go and worked out a deal with Pharnaces to recognize his sovereignty over Pontus in exchange for not making trouble. However, upon his ascension to the throne the new Pontic King had made a point to track down any Roman citizen he could find and castrate him. This was a crime that Caesar could not let go unpunished.

So as he traveled through Asia Minor, Caesar humored the Pontic envoys sent to work out a lasting peace. He replied with kind words and generous promises but it was all merely a show to buy himself some time as he marched toward Pontus. The speed with which Caesar moved took Pharnaces off guard and before he knew it, Caesar was at his doorstep, and having arrived he immediately changed tone. There would be no peace with a man who castrated Roman citizens. Pharnaces, who thought he was on the verge of a deal with Rome, quickly assembled his army as Caesar dug in outside the hill fort of Zela, where the Pontic King was holding court.

The only hope for Pharnaces was a surprise attack before the Romans were firmly entrenched, so at dawn while the legionaries dug trenches, the Pontic Army poured out of the gates of the fort. At first Caesar could not believe they were really attacking, but it was soon obvious that this was no bluff. Throwing aside their shovels the Romans tried to assemble as the enemy army hit. In the din of battle it

took longer than usual for the Legions to pull themselves together, but once some order was imposed on the battle, the Romans quickly gained the upper hand. The Pontic army was destroyed and Caesar let his men sack the town. Writing to a friend in Rome, Caesar described the campaign in Pontus simply: “Veni. Vidi. Vici.” — I came. I saw. I conquered.

Back in Rome

Caesar continued west through Greece without incident and soon enough, landed on the shores of Italy. There to greet him in Brundisium was Cicero, who had gone home after the defeat at Pharsalus, and was now ready to face whatever punishment Caesar had in mind for him. However, Caesar, who had tried his whole career to win Cicero over to his side, merely embraced the old senator and asked him to join him on the final leg of his journey so they could catch up.

Back in Rome, Caesar's first order of business was removing Mark Antony from power. While he had been on campaign in the east Caesar had been appointed dictator by what was left of the Senate and Antony had been made Master of Horse. Legally, when the dictator is absent, the word of a Master of Horse becomes law, and Antony had let absolute power corrupt him absolutely. Caesar refused to revive the horrifying proscriptions that had marked the reigns of Marius, Cinna and Sulla, but his chief lieutenant showed no such restraint and terror had gripped the city while Antony lived a lavish life of drunken excess — casually murdering his real or imagined enemies. However, the bloody, debauched reign of Antony did have a silver lining — it made Caesar look benign by comparison. All he had to do to win the people's affection when he came home was remove Antony from office.

After bringing a measure of peace to the strife torn city, he set aside the mantle of dictator and was again elected consul. He kept Antony on the sidelines though and instead chose as his colleague an amiable and completely loyal cavalry commander name Marcus Lepidus. Lepidus would form the third leg of the Second Triumvirate along with Antony, and Caesar's great nephew and heir, Gaius Octavius, the future Caesar Augustus.

My Fellow Citizens

Satisfied that the eastern provinces were pacified and the situation in Rome was under control Caesar finally turned his attention to the problem in North Africa. However, just as he was getting started on the initial planning of an invasion, he had to deal with a revolt from an unexpected corner — his own troops. The men who had conquered Gaul, secured Italy, sprinted across the continent to Spain and back, crossed the Adriatic in the middle of winter, defeated Pompey, taken Egypt and then marched back home again had finally had enough. Their pay-checks were chronically late and promises of discharge and land grants were forever just one more campaign away. When word came that Caesar was planning to lead them all in an invasion of North Africa they mutinied. Marching north from their camps in southern Italy they planted themselves just outside the gates of Rome with a list of demands.

Against the advice of his friends, Caesar rode out alone to meet them. Standing in front of the assembled legions, the men who had been his family for a decade or more, Caesar calmly asked them what he could do to make them happy. Their tough talk about demanding gold and land melted away and they told Caesar all they desired was to be discharged from service. In response Caesar dealt them a cruel blow — he granted their request. Telling them he would handle the matters of back pay and land grants when he returned from Africa he turned to leave the camp, and in bidding goodbye he addressed them now not as “my comrades” but as “my fellow citizens.” It was too much to take. The soldiers were utterly shamed. Were they really deserting their general on the eve of his final battle? Were they really going to force Caesar to meet his enemies with only raw recruits to protect him? If he won, were they really going to let those recruits march back to Rome in triumph and be awarded honors that had been secured by their own hard work and sacrifice? This hit them all in a rush as Caesar left the stage and immediately the calls went out for him to take them back. Caesar paused and let them twist in the wind for a heartbeat before returning to the stage. When we return from Africa, he told them, every man will be granted land and pay and be honorably discharged from service but first we must go to Africa. The soldiers exploded in cheers, shouting their thanks and promising a great victory.

I Hold You Now, Africa

So in early 46 BC, two years after crossing the wintery Adriatic, Caesar readied his legions for a similar winter crossing of the straights between Sicily and North Africa. While Metellus Scipio had gathered somewhere between ten and fourteen legions, Caesar once again charged into the belly of the beast heavily outnumbered. Eager to make the crossing and establish a beachhead under Scipio's radar, Caesar set sail from Sicily with just a single legion. His men, terrified of drowning in the choppy sea, were overjoyed to see land appear on the horizon but were horrified when they saw Caesar disembark onto the shores of Africa. While climbing from the ship he became entangled in his cloak and fell face first onto the beach — a terrible omen for the superstitious Romans. However, Caesar thought fast and tried to play off the mishap. According to Suetonius, he hugged the sand and cried: "I hold you now, Africa!"

For the first few months after landing things went badly for Caesar. Reinforcements were continually being blown off course or captured by the senatorial forces. His legions already ashore were harassed constantly by detachments of Numidian cavalry who would strike and disappear with impunity. Access to supplies was terrible and his foraging parties kept coming back empty-handed or not at all. Caesar finally decided to move his men to the interior where food was more plentiful, but as soon as he began the march, the entire Numidian cavalry, led by Roman officers appeared on the horizon. Caesar was forced to slowly retreat after being encircled and mocked by his rival commanders. However, the attacking Numidians were unable to break Caesar's lines and he made it to the high ground where horses were more of a hindrance than a help. They staved off the attack and the Numidians finally retreated, but huddled amongst the rocks, bloody, tired and hungry, it was looking like Caesar should have heeded the ill omen and just gone back to Italy.

Battle of Thapsus — 46 BC

However, Caesar managed to hold his army together until spring, by which point the continuously arriving reinforcements finally gave him an army he felt he could take into battle, rather than simply fend off attacks. Of course, what looked to Caesar like a big enough army to take into battle usually looked to everyone else like an army that could be easily overrun by fourteen legions. It certainly looked that way to Metellus Scipio, right up until the moment his much larger army was completely destroyed.

The decisive battle came at the port city of Thapsus, whose unique geography led both sides to think they were laying a clever trap for the other. The city itself lay on an isthmus, with the sea on one side and heavy marshes on the other with only two narrow strips of dry land connecting the city to the mainland. When Caesar marched in and overran the garrison stationed there, Scipio jumped at the opportunity Caesar presented. All he had to do was blockade the narrow exits and Caesar would be trapped. Unbeknownst to Scipio, however, this was exactly what Caesar wanted. By forcing the battle onto the narrow strips of land Scipio's greater numbers would be negated and the ferocity of Caesar's veteran legions would be the greatest factor in the fight. Which is of course exactly what happened.

With King Juba marching to hold the southern escape route, Caesar massed his own army on the other side to face Metellus, who could not resist attacking. Just as Caesar planned, Metellus's troops were unable to overwhelm Caesar's as they were forced into a bottleneck. The battle soon turned into a bloodbath. Caesar's troops, believing that this was really the last battle of the civil war were ferocious and soon some 10,000 of Metellus's infantry lay dead and his army was shattered. King Juba, realizing he had backed the wrong horse in the Roman civil war, committed suicide upon hearing news of Caesar's victory. Scipio tried to escape with the remnants of his men, but drowned when his ship sank on its way to Spain.

In Utica, the capital of the Roman province of Africa where all of this action took place, Cato received the news with characteristic stoicism. He had held the city for the senate during most of the civil war, despite the fact that its inhabitants were overwhelmingly pro-Caesar. Caesar's most implacable and incorruptible opponent knew that the end had come. He also knew that there was nothing Caesar liked more than pardoning his enemies and leaving them in his debt. Cato had no intention of giving him the pleasure. After setting his affairs in order he retired for the evening with a copy of Plato's

Phaedo, the dialogue that ends with Socrates drinking the hemlock tea. Cato had smuggled a knife into the tent with him (despite being searched by his son who feared his father's intentions) and plunged it into his stomach when he was done reading. When his body hit the floor his friends came running and a doctor patched the old senator back together. However, Cato was nothing if not stubborn. When he came to, he ripped out the bandages, causing enough damage that this time he died, defying Caesar for the last time.

Four Triumphs

After making sure he had nothing left to fear in Africa, Caesar returned to Italy and in the summer of 46 BC made his triumphal entrance into Rome. For all he had accomplished and all the battles he had won Caesar had yet to celebrate an official triumph. He had thrown away his one opportunity years before when he chose to run for consul instead, a bold move at the time as triumphs were usually once-in-a-lifetime events for a Roman general. However, perhaps to prove that he had been right to forgo that opportunity, Caesar planned to celebrate his victories with not one, but four triumphs, one each to celebrate his victories in Gaul, Greece, Egypt and North Africa. Coinciding with these great marches, Caesar threw lavish banquets and gladiatorial games. The wars were finally over — it was time to celebrate.

The masses of Rome praised Caesar to the hilt and jumped headlong into his running party. They cheered as he hauled Vercingetorix out of the cell he had been languishing in and had him strangled. They laughed at giant depictions of all the foreign enemies he had beaten and marveled at the exotic creatures he put on display. However, in the fourth and final triumph Caesar finally made a mistake and pushed things too far. While the Romans had no problem cheering his victories over Egyptian eunuchs, when the floats bearing images of dying Cato and fleeing Metellus came down the street the mood of the masses changed. No one actually liked Cato, but should they really be reveling in the suicide of the great statesman? It made them think about who they were celebrating and what they were celebrating. Stability was wonderful and everyone was glad the civil war was over but what now? With Cato dead was there anyone left to defend the republic? Was there even a republic left to defend? Caesar was surprised at the reaction. All he had done was dislodge the corrupt oligarchs who sat parasitically at the top of the Roman political economy, the people ought to be offering up toast after toast to the death of Cato but here they were mourning him. It didn't make any sense. Caesar chose not to dwell on it, he had work to do. However, the seeds of disenchantment had been planted.

Enlightened Reforms

As I mentioned in passing a few chapters back, if the governing apparatus of the state was to fall into the hands of a single man, Rome could have done a lot worse than Julius Caesar (and as we will see down the line, Rome eventually does do quite a bit worse than Julius Caesar). While the Mark Antonies of the world see absolute power as a vehicle for personal indulgence, the Julius Caesars of the world see absolute power as a vehicle for total reform. Caesar saw in the old republican system a laundry list of injustices, irrationalities and inefficiencies that did unnecessary harm to empire. He brought with him to power an ambitious agenda designed to right the ship of state. However, where Sulla had attempted a similar righting of the ship by turning to the past Caesar's eye was firmly on the future. The republic was dead and the outmoded ways it did business ought to die with it. If Rome was to rule what it had conquered, it needed a system-wide overhaul.

The first thing on his agenda was a proper census. Since the start of the civil war three years earlier there had been massive upheavals in the population and economy. Families had moved, fled, had their property seized, moved back, resettled elsewhere or been consumed by violence and anarchy. No one had any real idea how many people actually lived in Rome, nor really who owned what anymore. Caesar sent agents from house to house to count every man woman and child and determine their citizenship status and income. The immediate issue was Caesar's suspicion that the free grain dole was being abused by non-citizen foreign residents and by citizens whose property disqualified them from state charity.

When the numbers came back, they showed that while some 320,000 had been receiving grain allotments, only 150,000 actually qualified. So Caesar halved the grain allotments, instantly saving the state huge sums of money.

Also contained within the numbers, which showed a total population of about 900,000, Caesar discovered that Rome had become economically unbalanced. There was a ton of poor laborers and a few rich nobles but the middle class was badly under-represented. So he instituted a dual policy to solve the problem. On the one hand, he offered citizenship to any foreign professionals who migrated to the city, while on the other hand he set up a colonization program offering land to citizens who moved out to the provinces. Over the next few years some 80,000 members of the urban poor took Caesar up on his offer and moved out of the city, while teachers and

doctors from across the empire re-settled in the capital. It was a win-win-win for everyone. Skilled professionals received citizenship, poor workers moved out of the slums and onto small farms, and Rome itself became more prosperous.

At the same time, Caesar took care of his loyal soldiers and lived up to his promise to release them and grant them back pay and land. As much as he loved them though, he made sure to scatter the veteran settlements across the whole of the Empire. There was nothing more dangerous than congregating veterans — eventually they get ideas. He also followed through on the promises he had made to his foreign allies while he traveled the Empire during the wars — that if he won, Roman citizenship would be the prize of victory.

Caesar had always seen the restrictions on citizenship as a great hindrance to the empire, benefiting only the nobles who jealously hoarded power. Having already granted citizenship to the population of his old province of Cisalpine Gaul in the early stages of the war, Caesar liberally granted citizenship to allies, and men he hoped would become his allies, across the multi-national empire. Not only did it bind the men personally to Caesar but in the future it would bind their families to Rome. Citizenship in the Roman Empire meant that potentially seditious elements in Syria or Spain or Greece would now see their interests aligned with Rome's. Caesar had the vision to see that the empire would not survive if it simply remained a "Roman" empire. It must embrace its growing multi-ethnic character or it would inevitably fracture. To this end he also expanded the ranks of the depleted senate to some thousand members and to the horror of old conservatives welcomed into the august body important men from across the empire, regardless of their national origins — who were loyal to Caesar.

After taking care of all these human questions, enfranchisement, grain doles, colonization, Caesar turned to the physical infrastructure of the empire. The city had been crumbling and, as in the case of the old senate house, had been deliberately destroyed in the chaos of the previous few years. Caesar initiated a range of public works projects, rebuilding and expanding the neglected city. Moreover, he had his eye not just on Rome itself. He personally drew up plans for an expanded and rationalized harbor at the poorly conceived but vitally important port of Ostia. He also initiated a program to drain the swamps around Italy, which he saw as little more than factories for malaria. The modernization program was bold and far reaching, but perhaps his boldest and farthest reaching program was to re-imagine the nature of time itself.

Since its inception, Rome had operated on a lunar calendar. To handle the lag between the 355 day lunar year and the 365 day solar year, the high priests were forever inserting holy days to keep the months and years aligned. However, in the chaos of the war years the calendar had been neglected and things were completely out of whack. Caesar decided to prevent this from ever happening again by officially moving Rome onto a solar calendar. Using a Greek astronomer's calculations, he declared a 12 month, 365 day year, with a leap day scheduled every three years.^[6] This error would hang around for another thirty years until the reforms of Augustus. The Julian calendar would remain in effect in the west until the 1500s when it was tweaked by Pope Gregory to reflect the subtle drift of the equinoxes over the centuries. However, in substance we live today in the calendar Caesar declared unilaterally in 46 BC. The month of July, Julii, should tell us everything we need to know about the impact of Caesar's vision.

There is little doubt that Caesar's reforms had a positive impact on the Roman Empire, and coupled with the subsequent overhauls initiated by Augustus, his policies set the stage for another five centuries of Roman dominance over the Mediterranean basin. However, there was still the issue of how these necessary reforms were being executed. It had been 500 years since the Romans had driven out Tarquinius Superbus and founded their republic, believing that never again should one man hold absolute power over his countrymen. On what authority was Caesar really acting? What were his real intentions? When the crowds in the street hailed him as Caesar Rex and he casually waved them off, was he waving off their attempts to crown him, or waving off their attempts to crown him as simply premature? In the next chapter we will go into the details of Caesar's legal authority during this period, but there was a growing contingent among the waning nobility that did not believe Caesar's claims that he would restore the old order as soon as order was restored. When a group of senators called on Caesar one afternoon and he did not rise to greet them as equals but instead remained seated in lordly fashion, they saw their worst fears confirmed. Caesar was aiming to make himself a king and a god and he must be stopped. While Caesar was clearly aiming for immortality, they knew he was mortal — a mortal man who could, and must, be killed.

Chapter 46

Sic Semper Tyrannis

46 – 44 BC

In 46 BC Julius Caesar stayed in Rome for an extended period for the first time since heading to Gaul some 12 years earlier. During the summer, he was joined by Queen Cleopatra, who visited the city as an honored guest. Somewhat awkwardly for Caesar, she brought with her the product of their affair, a small boy nicknamed Caesarion, or Little Caesar, who would prove to be the great general's only son. Though Cicero found her infuriating and Calpurnia cannot have been happy to see her husband's lover parading around their illegitimate child, Cleopatra charmed the city and was formally made a Friend of Rome by the senate. The Roman envelopment of Egypt, long sought and long staved off by bribery, was now official.

Through the spring and summer Caesar worked furiously on his reform projects trying to salvage the Roman economy and restore stability to the empire. At this point Caesar still officially served as co-Consul with Lepidus as his colleague, and had not yet embraced the permanent role of dictator that he would be remembered for. However, while technically he was just another republican executive, in reality the word of mere Consul Julius Caesar was the undisputed law of the land. It must have felt good to finally wield the power he had sought for so long and it felt doubly good that for the first time in years that there were no enemies on the horizon threatening to take it all away.

Rebellion in Spain — 46-45 BC

As he re-made the city though, he received new reports of trouble in Spain. At first he hoped to simply brush them aside — he had won the war, he was in power, he did not want to hear that the sons of Pompey were raising more legions in Hispania to challenge his rule. Finally though, he was forced to acknowledge the problem when word came that the rag-tag remnants of the senate's North African army were now 13 legions strong.

In the autumn of 46 BC, Caesar set out from the city with two of his veteran legions, marching to Spain in less than a month, gathering recruits along the way and joining with a force that had been raised in anticipation of his arrival. In the end, he marshaled some 40,000 to face off against the 70,000 raised by the Pompeys. The speed of his advance had taken his enemies by surprise and Caesar was able to reclaim much of the territory taken by the Pompey brothers. With Caesar in country and clearly every bit the general he had always been, soldiers on the other side began to get nervous and defect in droves. The Pompeys found themselves forced to challenge Caesar in battle immediately recognizing that if they waited any longer they risked losing their whole army to defection. So in March 45 BC, on a slope outside the fortified city of Munda the two sides met.

Caesar was in the weaker downhill position but as always acted boldly and ordered his legions to charge up the hill. The battle was a hard fought, bloody affair. Caesar himself was recorded to have said afterwards that while he usually fought for victory, at Munda he fought for his life. Indeed, the battle was going against him until he personally took charge of the right wing and rallied his beleaguered troops. The Pompeians reinforced the line in the face of Caesar's counter attack, but wound up losing the left as a result, allowing Caesar's cavalry to break through and surround them. Engulfed, the Pompeian army broke. The final numbers of 30,000 dead Pompeians to a mere thousand for Caesar hid how close Caesar came to losing everything. However, what hid nothing was the 13 legionary standards Caesar captured. Military resistance in Spain was shattered and Pompey's sons fled. One would be captured a few months later and executed while the other would remain on the run for a decade before being caught and executed by Octavian.

Caesar remained in Spain for a few months, consolidating his rule and repairing the damage done by the corrupt and ruthless governor he had left in charge after winning the province in 49 BC. Then with autumn approaching and the situation in Spain dealt with, Caesar and

his entourage returned to Rome. Unlike his return to the city after the Alexandrian campaign or after his victory at Thapsus, this time when he returned there was no enemy left in the entire empire to challenge him. This time, he really was the undisputed master of Rome. However, it does not take an army to bring down a single man. With every opposition army destroyed, Caesar's enemies turned to conspiracy. The object now was not to defeat Caesar, but to kill him.

At first it was only a fanatic contingent of enemies who thirsted for Caesar's blood but his attitude after becoming sole master of the empire alienated many who were ambivalent about his rule, and embittered many who had been his greatest friends. Mark Antony though, despite the recent falling out with his old friend and numerous overtures from the conspirators, refused to join the ranks of the disaffected plotters. His continued loyalty was well received and on his way back to Rome from Spain, with his young great-nephew Octavian by his side, Caesar picked up Antony who he had exiled to Gaul and the two old friends patched things up. However, while Antony's support never wavered, a man for whom Caesar's support never wavered, Marcus Brutus, would soon find himself at the forefront of the plot to kill his would-be father-figure.

King Caesar?

The main controversy surrounding Caesar after his return to Rome in September 45 BC, and the one that was the primary catalyst for his assassination, was whether or not he was planning to have himself crowned king. Caesar always went to great lengths to prove that he had no desire to establish a monarchy, but the rumor persisted and overt attempts to crown him kept popping up “spontaneously”. Throughout 45 BC, while he continued to serve officially as consul, this time he had not bothered with the formality of naming a colleague, and he seemed to be drifting more and more toward undisguised autocracy. Just as his attitude was becoming haughtier, his grasp of public relations, once his greatest asset, began to slip.

First, Caesar proved he had learned nothing from the outrage over his last triumph, and staged an official event to celebrate his victory in Spain. Again the people of Rome were dismayed by a parade glorifying the defeat of their countrymen. The sons of Pompey may have been personal enemies of Caesar but were they really public enemies of Rome? Second, Caesar managed to get himself embroiled in a pointless public spat with Cicero over Cato’s legacy. The great orator had published a eulogy of his dead colleague, lavishly praising the old defender of the Republican faith. Caesar flew into a rage and against all good sense wrote a scathing reply called the *Anti-Cato* in which he lobbed every smear he could think of against his old rival. Cicero was taken aback by the fury of Caesar’s reaction but delighted in how unhinged the attack seemed. Cato may have been a lot of things but a drunken miser who pimped his wife was not among them (though the latter charge, through some tortured logic, had some basis in truth. Cato had divorced his wife so she could marry another richer man and then, when the new husband died, remarried her and reaped the rewards of her inheritance). The people of Rome though did not see what Caesar wanted them to see about Cato, they focused instead on his petulant hysterics, a side of Caesar they had never seen before and did not like. His enemies could not print copies of the *Anti-Cato* fast enough.

In the midst of these public offences, little things kept popping up that renewed fears of Caesar’s monarchical ambitions and despite his protests, he certainly began to act the part. He secured the right to wear his triumphal regalia at public games, which may have seemed like no big deal, but the triumphal robes were purple, just like the royal robes of old. Added to this was the golden throne he had installed in the Senate house to sit in and a pattern started to emerge. To top things off he ordered that a statue of himself be carried along

with the procession of gods that would make its way through the city on holy days. Not only was he likely planning to make himself king, but he was already claiming to be a god.

One morning the citizens of Rome awoke to find that someone had placed a crown on a public statue of Caesar during the night. Two tribunes, vocal opponents of Caesar, ordered that the crown be removed and made a great fuss about the outrage. Not long after the incident, while he made his way through town, Caesar was hailed as king by a man in the crowd. The same two tribunes had the man hauled off to stand trial but Caesar ordered the man freed and instead turned his wrath against the two agitating tribunes, stripping them of their property and forcing them to resign from office. What remains a mystery is whether Caesar himself planted first the crown and then the man in the crowd as trial balloons or whether the two tribunes, hoping to score political points engineered the events. Perhaps one was engineered by one side and the other by the other, or maybe they were both just signs of organic public support for a King Caesar.

For many who would take part in the assassination plot though, the last straw was when a group of senators came to bestow upon Caesar a long list of new honors: Father of the Fatherland, Imperator, that sort of thing, and Caesar failed to rise to greet them. There are conflicting reports about whether Caesar was sick at the time and the whole incident was blown out of proportion by his enemies, or whether he miscalculated the depths of the senate's new subservience but regardless, the story got out and fed the rumor mill.

Caesar downplayed all of the kingly talk but continued to consolidate power. He stepped down from the consulship in October and placed two loyal politicians in the office, bypassing both the senate and public elections. His successors were just placeholders. He next had the senate formally appoint him dictator but unlike his previous flirtations with the office, this time he would not be standing down anytime soon. He was granted a sequence of 10 consecutive one year terms as dictator. However, even this proved not to be enough and in early 44 BC, he cast aside the expiration date and had himself named Dictator in Perpetuity, Dictator for Life. He might not be a king in name, but the difference between kingship and Caesar's position was nominal only. And even this distinction seemed destined to be cast aside as Caesar had a priest announce a contrived prophesy that only a king could conquer the Parthian Empire. Everyone knew Caesar was planning, with the full support of the Roman people, to launch a war with Parthia to revenge the losses of Crassus. If they wanted the mission to succeed, well, you heard the prophesy...

However, the movement to make Caesar a king seems to have died in February 44 BC. During a rather strange (it was even considered strange by Roman standards) religious festival that involved men running through the streets naked, Mark Antony produced a laurel crown announcing that the people had asked him to offer it to Caesar. However, the reaction from those same people seemed to indicate the opposite. Roman crowds cheered when they approved of something and were silent when they did not. When Antony offered the crown, you could have heard a pin drop. Caesar immediately read the crowd and used the opportunity not to crown himself monarch, as he might have planned, but to declare forcefully that Jupiter alone was the king of Rome. At this the crowd exploded in cheers. They could accept autocracy, but they would never accept monarchy. Whether or not it was Caesar's plan all along to win the support of the masses by engineering a very public rebuke of monarchy, it was clear that a king would not be conquering Parthia anytime soon.

The Parthian Expedition

The last months of Caesar's life were consumed with this planned invasion of Parthia. He had already moved 16 legions and 10,000 cavalry across the Adriatic and was preparing to launch the campaign in April 44 BC. What Caesar had in mind seemed insane for a man nearing the age of retirement, but his self-confidence was unwavering and he envisioned nothing less than the greatest series of conquests in Roman history, conquests to rival those of Alexander himself. Caesar planned to invade Parthia via Armenia and after defeating the Parthians (which he took to be a foregone conclusion based on what he had seen of their armies while passing through the east), he would march north through the Caucasus, pacifying the fierce nomadic tribes of the steppes and then follow the Danube back into Europe capping off his run by conquering Germania. His plan, in short, was to return to Italy the greatest Roman who had ever lived. If only he had lived.

Conspiracy

Caesar's enemies realized that time was running out for them to do something. It could be years before he was back in Rome and if he managed to accomplish half of what he was setting out to do, there would be no stopping him on his return. The people would beg Caesar to be their king. The republic would be destroyed forever. The time to act was now.

In the months since Caesar's victory in Spain the list of conspirators had grown to about 60 names. Some, like Cassius, were on board because they had been Caesar's enemy from the start. Others, like Gaius Trebonius, had been with Caesar from the time of the Gallic Wars but felt sidelined in his new regime. In his zeal to embrace his enemies, Caesar had pushed aside the friends who had got him to where he was. To men like Trebonius, Caesar was no longer a vehicle for their personal ambition but an obstacle in its path. Finally, there were men like Marcus Brutus, the tortured Judas of the Ides of March, who seems to have simply been a republican idealist, pushed into the plot by domineering friends. They reminded him constantly of his ancestor Marcus Junius Brutus who had led the revolution against the Tarquins and sworn the Romans to their sacred oath of opposing monarchy forever. Every night, on a statue of that Brutus, graffiti would appear asking if the Brutus name was dead. Though he loved Caesar personally, he finally caved in to the pressure and agreed to join the plot and exploit the fact that he was the last person Caesar would suspect of treachery. For the most part, though, the plotters were personal rivals who, on any normal day would have nothing to do with each other. However, this was no ordinary day. Today they all agreed that Caesar must be killed.

Numerous assassination scenarios were suggested but the conspirators finally settled on a meeting of the senate as the right time and place. Only senators would be allowed into Pompey's Theater, which is where the body had temporarily moved, leaving Caesar without the protection of his bodyguards. Formal senatorial togas would also allow the assassins to conceal their daggers easily, the agreed murder weapon. The plan was simple: lure Caesar into the senate, surround him, and then stab him to death. With Caesar planning to leave Rome in just a few days, the conspirators also set a date: March 15 — the Ides of March.

The Ides of March

Caesar awoke on the morning of the fifteenth and tried to go about his business as usual. There were final preparations to sort out before he left for the east and the senate had called a session for that day so that he could revue some new petition. Caesar had been warned previously by a soothsayer to be on guard on the Ides of March and he was further troubled by the fevered nightmares of his wife Calpurnia, who had dreamed just that night of his death. His wife and friends begged him to listen to the ill omens that surrounded the day and stay home and while Caesar considered the option, he was convinced by his old surrogate son Brutus, that to ignore the senate's request for his presence would be seen as an insult. They were already assembled and awaiting his appearance, to simply blow them off would be the height of bad manners and feed the royal rumors. Caesar was convinced. He would go and humor the old men one last time before leaving for the simple comforts of his military tent. The worst he was likely to suffer listening to whatever overwrought petition the senate had deemed worthy of his attention was acute boredom.

The petition, of course, was a fake, entered for public consideration by the plotting senators to lure their prey into a trap. Caesar made his way through the streets carefully led by Brutus. Mark Antony had learned the night before that some plot was afoot, though he did not know the details of the plan, and hurried to try to warn Caesar but Brutus carefully steered the dictator in through a back door. Antony was unable to reach him through the crowd. Caesar took his place at the front of the chamber and requested the petition. The senator who brought the scroll forward, handed it over but as he did so, he grabbed at Caesar's toga. Caesar was shocked by the move and exclaimed, "Why, this is violence!" With Caesar held in place another senator named Servilius Casca approached from behind and, pulling a dagger from his robes, stabbed at Caesar's throat. Military instinct taking over, Caesar dodged the attack and seized Casca's arm crying: "Casca, you villain, what are you doing?" Casca having lost the element of surprise called out for his brothers to help him. At this word, the 60 members of the conspiracy rushed in and surrounded Caesar stabbing at him recklessly. Caesar tried to run, but blinded by blood and confusion tripped and fell. As he lay on the ground the stabbing continued. In the end, all Caesar could do was cover his face with his toga and die in a pool of his own blood.

The legend surrounding the assassination has Caesar in anguish seeing Brutus among his attackers and crying either "You too, child?" or in Shakespeare's poetic turn: "Et tu, Brute?" However, these last

words did not begin to appear in the historical record until much later and even then, as in the case of Suetonius, the quotes are noted but dismissed as inaccurate. A similar embellishment has Brutus crying, “Sic semper tyrannis”, thus always to tyrants. Dramatic and memorable yes, but a complete fiction. Instead, the assassins are reported to have simply marched out of the chamber, leaving Caesar’s body behind. They are said to have then paraded through the streets announcing that they had killed Caesar and set Rome free. However, to their surprise they were not met as the liberators they imagined themselves to be. The people of Rome greeted them instead with stunned silence. Then they went home. Then they locked their doors. They knew that whatever stability Caesar brought was about to be blown apart.

Julius Caesar died on 15 March 44 BC. He had been stabbed 23 times, though doctors determined that in the end only a single thrust to his heart had been fatal. He was the last and greatest of the old triumvirs but in the end, just like Crassus and Pompey before him, he died an ignominious, violent death — a victim of his own outsized ambition.

For a brief moment the fate of Rome hung in the balance. Would the liberators, as they were now calling themselves, see their dream of a restored republic come true? Or would Julius Caesar be revealed as merely a symptom rather than the cause of the disease that plagued Rome? In the next chapter the full extent of the rot at the core of the republican system will be revealed. Mark Antony would turn the people against the supposed liberators, reminding the masses that all Caesar had even done was remove the unjust chains placed upon them by greedy oligarchs. Brutus and Cassius, who fancied themselves heroes, would be driven from the city they thought they had saved and Caesar’s revealed heir, Gaius Octavius, the bright, young, great-nephew of the dead dictator would make his first appearance on the public stage. The Romans would be forced to endure another thirteen years of chaos and civil war before they were once again granted peace. After all the violence, it would not matter to anyone that the peace would be guaranteed by the rule of a single man, Gaius Octavius, Caesar Augustus — the first Emperor of Rome.

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* If you answered "a best supporting actor Oscar for Peter Ustinov" to that last one, you're right.

[1] In the original podcast there was an error here, stating that Octavius vetoed his impeachment from the tribunate. This would have been a logical and sensible measure — but Octavius didn't do it. Perhaps he saw the writing on the wall and decided it was better to get out before things got ugly.

[2] In the original podcast, I mistakenly said that Marius was Caesar's father in law.

[3] Thanks to History of Rome Podcast listener Detlef for correcting an error here which had stated that it was Mithridates VI and not IV.

[4] I accidentally fell for a common misattribution here. The actual epitaph is: "No friend ever served me, and no enemy ever wronged me, whom I have not repaid in full."

[5] Seriously. Look it up.

[6] Thanks to listener, Dave, who pointed out an error in the original podcast, which stated that Julius's calendar placed a leap year every four years.